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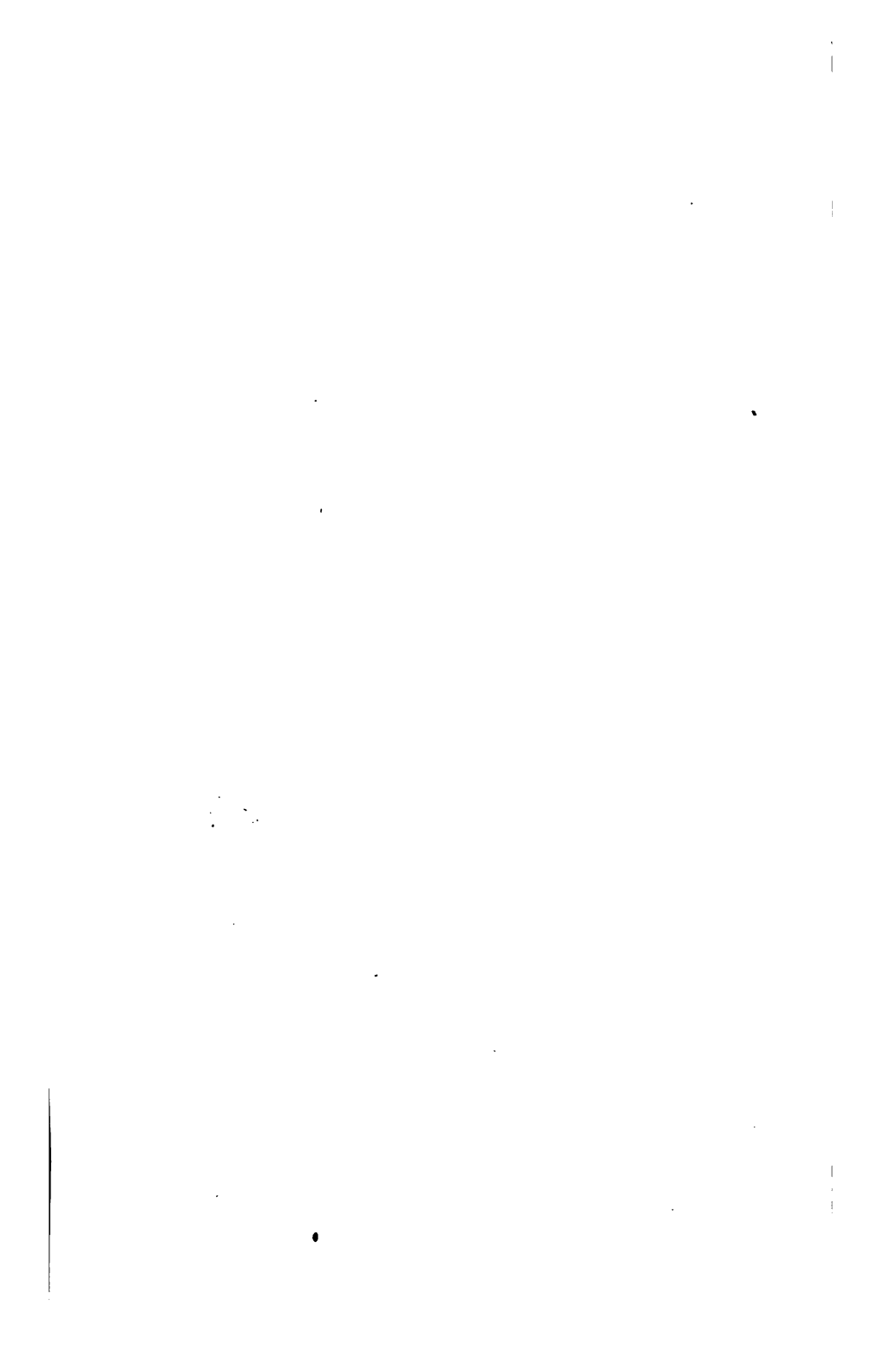
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THE
HEIR OF VALLIS.

BY
WILLIAM MATHEWS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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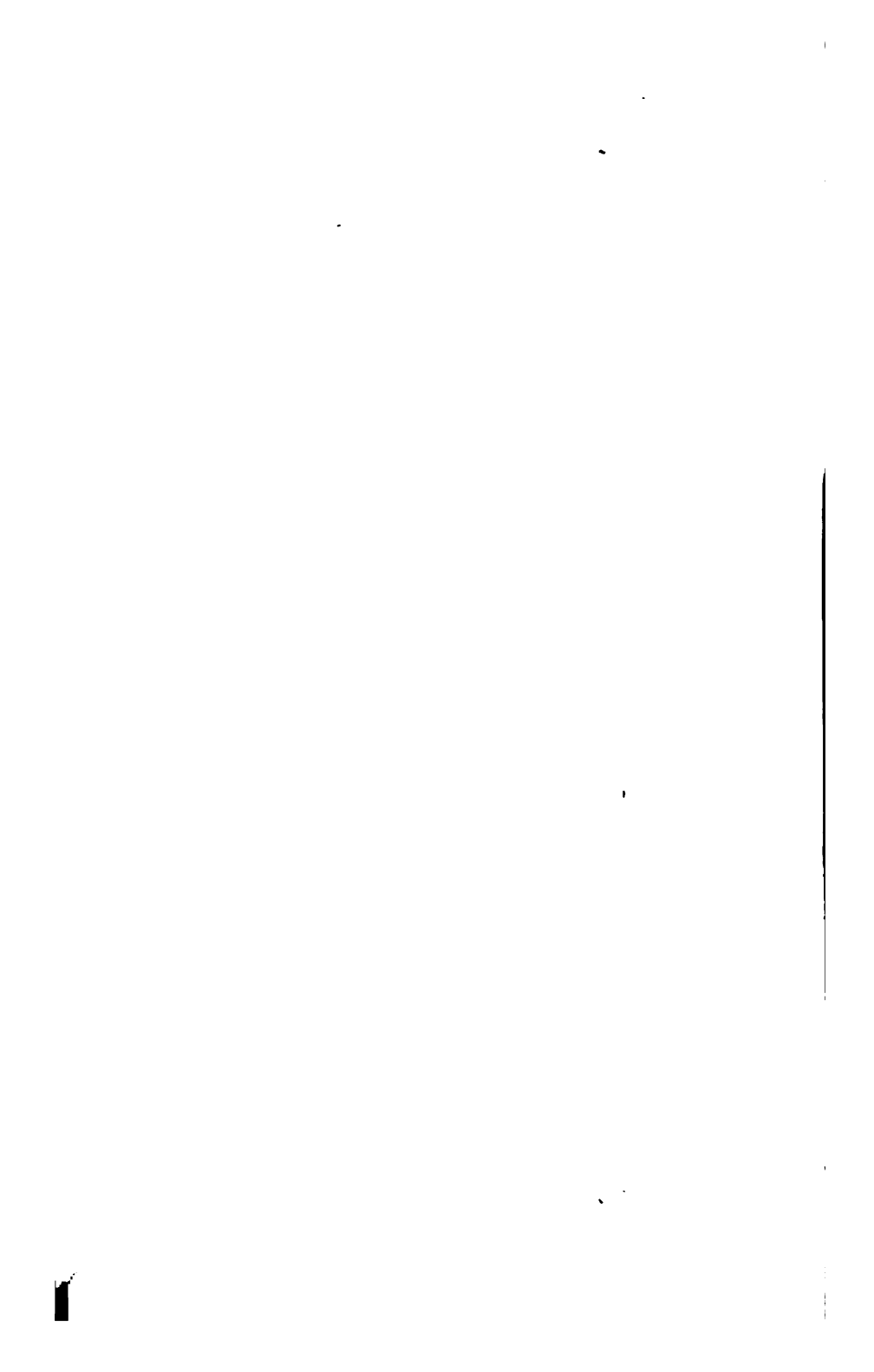
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THE HEIR OF VALLIS.

CHAPTER I.

7 ON the morning of a rainy bleak day in March, the good folk of the village of Darlington, then the last stage before reaching Oxford, were thrown into a state of consternation through the non-arrival of "the Express" at its appointed hour. Divers conjectures, usual in such cases, were afloat; fatal accidents were assumed, causing the apothecary's imagination to travel post-haste to the conviction that it was an ill wind that blew good to none; whilst the landlady of the "Bedford" came to the conclusion, that it would be only kind and proper to have well-aired beds in readiness, as well as a sympathizing countenance to comfort the luckless passengers, whose lightest mishaps, she

conjectured, were broken legs and dislocated shoulders. The hostler's opinion was, that as Harry—the coachman—would drive with his reins unbuckled, he always knew what would come of it; and others, particularly the harness-maker, knew what would happen through working the team without bearing-reins. In fine, the general conviction was, that some great catastrophe had taken place, owing to the coachman's blamable negligence; and parties stood about in groups, though it rained hard, with that expressive trait in the face, which we all assume when looking forward for a windfall. In the frame of mind in which the community of Darlington then was, it is a question whether the report of "all well" would not have been received with slight dissatisfaction.

Matters were certainly beginning to wear a somewhat alarming aspect—for the coach in question, not the least punctual on the road, was quite half-an-hour behind time, when an equestrian was perceived wending his course towards the village at a quick pace, from a point at which the looked-for object would appear. As this horseman drew rein at the door of the "Bedford," he was speedily surrounded by a group of eager questioners,

whom he treated very good-naturedly. In a few words he assured the honest people that no serious accident had happened to "the Express,"—the detention had arisen from the road being flooded some couple of miles from the village; fortunately, a person had been near to rectify matters, and, beyond a few broken buckles and straps, no damage had been sustained. When this gentleman had concluded his report, he dismounted from his horse, a thorough-bred gray of singular docility and beauty, and gave him to the hostler, with instructions which proved that the stranger considered he had given no common charge into his hands; then he entered the public room, and, after divesting himself of an upper coat, he turned to the window to note the arrival of the vehicle, that had that morning caused so vast an amount of concern to the inhabitants of Darlington.

The individual in question was a tall, finely formed man, apparently under thirty years of age, with an ease and elegance of demeanour, which said that his claim to the title of gentleman must be at once admitted. His features were regular and fine, his complexion of a rich brown hue—so brown indeed, that it might lead to the conclusion that he

had been a lengthened sojourner in a clime far more sunny and warm than ours. The passengers soon flocked in to snatch a hasty breakfast, and fortify themselves against further casualties. After some whispered remarks, one among the group stepped towards the stranger and observed:—

“I have to thank you for myself and my fellow-passengers, for your prompt and timely assistance in the dilemma in which we were placed just now. If you are bound to Oxford, I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again.” With these words, he tendered his card. The person who thus spoke was evidently on admirable terms with himself, and his manner was confident and insinuating. In size he was something under the middle height, of slight, singularly elastic, well-knit figure; he was certainly handsome, of the Italian cast of feature, but it was not a good face; there were lines of contempt about the mouth, not hidden by the well trimmed moustache; a severity or harshness in the expression of the eye, guarded, too, by that watchfulness which worldly tact calls up to check the turbulent activity of a quick irascible temper. As he handed his card to the stranger, the eye of the latter was fixed on it, nor

was the gaze withdrawn for some moments; but his brown cheek grew flushed, and a feeling of strange significance was evidenced in his face, as he replied :

“ Mr Wilton, we shall assuredly meet again.”

The person thus addressed met the remark with a keen piercing glance. He smiled slightly as he turned upon his heel; but the smile betokened a sarcastic emotion rather than a pleasant one, and it soon disappeared, while the features again wore their appearance of contemptuous indifference.

“ I’ll lay a wager he’s one of the right sort,” said the old coachman, alluding to the stranger. “ Didn’t you see, Captain, how neatly he took that gallant little gray over the awkward double from the water when he volunteered to procure us assistance, after he got the leaders away from the bank? I had my eye on him, and I’ll be bound —— ”

“ Nonsense, Harry,” Mr Wilton interrupted him; “ he’s some horsedealer or other, I’m sure; those fellows can always ride a bit. Ask him yourself. But had n’t you better see to the cattle, I shall be ready in five minutes.”

The old coachman looked as if he did not much

like the order given him, but the "expected tip" kept him silent; still he could not refrain from muttering as he moved away, "More of a gentleman than yourself, Captain Wilton. A horse-dealer! Bah! I wonder where the likes of him is to be met with in that business." He passed on to the stable, where he found the stranger fondling tenderly the noble animal I have before mentioned. The old coachman's heart warmed at this interesting spectacle, and he became loquacious.

"I like these middle-sized, deep-chested, flat-legged, blood 'osses," he said; "bends his knee too, or I'm out a good deal. Them is loins for ye—and the back short too. Never mind the little hollow—all the pleasanter to ride. I'll bet a trifle he is a stanch one in the field."

The stranger smiled, and answered good-humouredly :

"He is a great favourite, and a gallant little horse to boot; but you English judges have no great opinion of the Arabs."

"An Arab!" remarked the coachman, taking a more decided survey of the animal's proportions. "And is he up to your weight?" now running his eye over the stranger's powerful form.

The owner of the animal that engrossed the conversation passed his hand with caressing action over the arched neck of his steed, as he replied :

“ For these three years past, he has been with me in strife and peril, and has more than once saved my life through his bottom and courage. Is he not a beauty ? ” the speaker asked, as he gently stroked his favourite, and then spoke to him in a foreign tongue, at the sound of which the thin, tapering ears were pricked up, and the glossy muzzle was rubbed against the master’s arm.

“ Is he for sale ? ” asked the individual Harry had styled Captain Wilton, who now lounged into the stable.

The owner of the horse turned quickly, and from the expression of his face, it was evident that he was influenced by some secret emotion, apart from annoyance at the unconscious remark ; he however answered calmly :

“ Are friends so common with you, Mr Wilton, that you can afford to dispose of the stanchest amongst them for gold ? ”

“ Oh ! by my faith, I’ve dropped my fancy for friendships for these twenty years almost. Like Byron, I tried friendship when I was eighteen, and

it gave me more trouble than love, and was not half so agreeable."

"And like Byron, I opine, you have experienced unalloyed satisfaction from your eccentric ethics." And then the stranger turned to the coachman and observed, that as his pet seemed so comfortable, he had not the heart to take him out in such miserable weather again that day: did he think he could find room for him to Oxford, "that is," he added with a smile, "if you are quite sure you will meet with no further disaster."

"As the gentleman is so fastidious, perhaps he would like to take the reins himself, Harry," said Wilton, with a sarcastic smile.

"'Twere better I should do so, perhaps: in a few minutes I shall be ready, and as I wish to derive some information about Oxford, perhaps you will take a seat by my side."

So saying, he walked from the stable, without heeding Wilton's audible retort; and on reaching the bar, inquired whether a letter with a portmanteau had arrived from S., addressed to Mr Langton. He was answered in the affirmative; the letter was given to him, and the portmanteau by his order was consigned to the

care of the guard. Langton then resumed his over-coat, and, with the self-reliant air of one who seldom wavered in his purpose, he quietly inspected the trappings of the team he had resolved to handle ; then gathering the reins together in quite an artistic manner, he gave his orders about his own horse, as he stepped lightly to the box and stated that he was "all ready." In a moment the coach whirled away, evidently under the command of a practised hand. The road from Darlington to Oxford was a pleasant one for the coachman and the horses. The pace was kept up well, and though Mr Langton had a spirited wheeler to manage, he had quite time to question "Harry" on points of seeming interest to himself. Wilton occasionally hinted that *their* position was rather precarious, but the general voice did not accede to or sanction his remarks. Langton had not been long in his hotel, before he intimated that he wished for a messenger to take a letter from him to a gentleman at Christ Church ; and in the next chapter I hope to throw some light on the nature of Langton's visit to Oxford. It seemed of moment, for he said, after he had despatched his letter, "I must endeavour to see Charles Napier, before I leave."

CHAPTER II.

CHARLES NAPIER, a gentleman commoner of Christ Church, was in his room, reclining in an easy chair drawn somewhat closely to the fire. Several books were scattered upon a table near, a "Times" of the latest date was over them, but it could quickly be seen that the occupant of the room was neither in a mood for amusement nor study. He was evidently ill at ease; his thoughts wandered, his mind was abstracted, and a degree of restlessness characterized his actions, which argued that he was subject to some acute anxiety. More than once he left his seat and walked to the window, apparently without motive, for he would leave it again immediately. He was dressed as if about to undertake a journey; and a portmanteau lay ready packed in one corner of the room.

The young man's reverie was interrupted by the

entrance of his servant, who handed two letters to him; one of them bore a post mark on its envelope, the other evidently had been sent by private hand. The latter underwent perusal: "An introduction from Dr Powell—Should Langton visit Oxford—Unfortunate—I must leave Oxford to-day—however, if *he* has seen Powell, I must see *him*. Bid the messenger," he said, "tell Mr Langton that I will be with him in the course of an hour."

When the man had departed on his mission, the other letter was perused. The contents were certainly of an affecting character, the reader's face was pale and troubled, and a grave thoughtfulness was depicted upon it. "This confirms the last report. Wilmott warned me to expect a great change in my father's state, and Mary would not write thus, unless there were cause of apprehension. Yet my father said nothing of all this to me in his last letter; but I understand him now; his thoughts were solely engrossed in that sad revelation. I wish indeed that it had not been delayed so long; but can *he* doubt my heart, can he question for a moment my wish to comfort him, to defend the family honour, to devote the sole energies of my mind to ward off this evil from us? No, surely no! Fare-

well, ambition; the honour of the old hearth must now be my care. I will hasten to Vallis House— Oh, Harry, why are you absent at such a time.”

Such were his hurried remarks as he bent over the letter. He was in the hey-day of manhood. The world's influence had not blotted out “home” from his memory; he dwelt on its past records with an almost childlike openness of heart. The communication was an affecting one; it told a son of a father's danger; with touching sensibility a sister dwelt on her own fears, and, consequently, drew so sad a picture of home-feeling and home-trembling, that anxiety was hardly capable of further extension. The son brooded over the thought that his father would die—It is a startling thought to a child; there are many fibres that cling very closely to existence to be torn away, many antecedent pleasures, and recollections of kindness, suddenly to lose vitality and connexion with reality; and more, the wilfulness of boyhood, and unatoned rebellion—no wonder that a child, in pondering on the thought of a parent's death, feels a strange mysterious mournfulness pervade his mind. When these natural emotions had in a measure subsided, and some short time had been given to reflection,

the young man roused himself to exertion; he left his apartment and repaired to the rooms of his friend and tutor, Mr Warton, to explain to him the necessity of his immediate departure from Oxford. Mr Warton was evidently grieved at the intelligence conveyed, for his interest in the young man's happiness was sincere.

"Then we are to part, Napier," he said, after the intimation had been made; "your sojourn amongst us is ended. Duties of a sterner nature summon you hence. In family affliction, a son's place is at his father's hearth. My life, Napier," he added, after a short pause, "is removed from what men call 'the world:' this is my world," and his eye was turned on the quadrangles of Christ Church; "these are my acquaintances and counsellors," pointing to volumes that filled many a shelf. "Such being my existence, secluded from the public path, I shall lose you to the eye, but not to the heart; I shall hope for your welfare, and rejoice in your prosperity."

"I know it," said the young man, earnestly. "Mr Warton, you have ever been my friend."

"Then we understand one another, Napier," remarked Warton. "I dislike professions; they do

not honour friendship. Words may be bountiful of zeal, but actions prove the true complexion of our feelings. Before you leave, can I render you any assistance? You told me the other day that you were very uneasy about your brother; have you obtained intelligence of him yet? If you have not, his lengthened absence is extraordinary, to say the least."

"It is," replied Charles Napier, "very extraordinary; we can glean no tidings of him. My father, whose nervous system is evidently acutely deranged through mental anxiety and physical weakness, suffers severe alarm on Harry's account,—in fact, I believe his recent illness the consequence of overwrought anxiety on this head."

Warton reflected a few minutes, and then remarked, "I accidentally met last evening an old schoolfellow of your brother's, when he was at Eton—William Neville. You know him, of course,—a sad reckless fellow, I fear. We exchanged a few words, and, from remarks dropped in my hearing, I found he had spent the past winter on the Continent. He is expecting a friend to join him to-day—Wilton—a man of varied talent. You live in their neighbourhood; is he an acquaintance of yours?"

"When I was about sixteen," answered Charles Napier, "I remember I was quite fascinated by Wilton's great practical talent and genius. I bent, as others did, to the magic sway of the Mowbray enchanter; with me, it was quite an affair of the heart; but I have scarcely met him since. Did it occur to you to ask William Neville, if he had encountered my brother in his rambles?"

"Yes," replied Warton; "and though I am no great observer, nor inclined to extract matter for serious suspicion from mere trifles, as your wise men sometimes do, I cannot help saying that I believe William Neville knows more about your brother than his words implied. I think it would be wise in you to throw yourself in his way, and question him yourself, before you leave Oxford."

"Perhaps it would," was the answer. "Ash-tonby has invited me to meet some friends to-night, and as he and Neville are acquainted, possibly he will be his guest. I will ascertain—and should it be so, I will defer my departure until to-night." He paused, and his countenance grew grave. Mr Warton regarded him with friendly concern.

"Reflection is vain," Charles Napier observed

after a short silence; "the more I speculate on my brother's conduct, the more I am perplexed. For nearly a year we have had no direct intelligence, and now the source whence he defrays his expenditure, as well as his present abode, are alike an enigma. No wonder my father is alarmed. But I must hasten home as speedily as possible, after I have spoken with William Neville. So farewell, Mr Warton;" and with these words he hurried from the room.

Warton gazed on his late companion as he crossed the quadrangle, and with grave concern in his countenance he said, "Poor fellow, his heart is heavy, and a noble spirit is deeply bruised. He is a son of whom a parent might well be proud; his character truly instances the virtue of judicious culture; but for his wise uncle's foresight, he might have followed in his elder brother's steps. A stern duty is before him. I see it plainly—and how will he act? Life, life! thou vast enigma; honour, and love, and truth, are thy inheritance to thy vassal, man. Charles Napier, my dear young friend, what will be your career? Life, a short month since adorned with high health and generous ambition, was full of promise and hope; but now,

harsh facts and human frailties ever hold the beautiful a prisoner. With wealth, how vast the care and responsibility. Few remember that an aspidochelone lies hidden amongst the rose leaves, and that its sweets should be extracted with prudent appetite."

Charles Napier was scarcely beyond the precincts of his college, when a gentleman suddenly accosted him.

"My dear fellow; one would think you were about to be dragged to Rome on Ixion's wheel, you look so miserably metaphysical."

"Ha! Ashtonby, is it you?" was the answer. "What can have seduced the fastidious Baronet into this atmosphere of growls and frowns?"

"We are on rather slippery ground just now, my friend, *within doors*; so I have come *out*, to perfect myself in standing firm on this slimy pavement. Hush, say nothing, your inferences will prove fallacious."

"Your remark, Ashtonby, is in keeping with the weather, rather misty."

"Well, we are not beginning to feed upon mist in a metaphorical sense," was the rejoinder, in a gay light laugh; "and as, in my foresight, I can see, that in making a *sternboard*—you know my

nautical accomplishments—we are likely to perplex the helmsman, I have resolved to cut the old barque ‘Alma Mater,’ whilst I can do so in safety, and join the *guard-ship*—*she* goes with the wind, *only* to the length of her moorings.”

“I declined your invitation for this evening; will you allow me to change my mind,” remarked Napier.

“Wish to change the conversation too, eh! Ah, Napier, I have wholesome fear of you. What are you book-worms driving at? If there are two things I hate above all others in this merry world, one of them is to see a fellow who can go ‘straight to hounds,’ receive a twist of the head about the question, which is digging the grave of independence hereabout, through a few sage visionaries discerning hidden aptitudes in the ambiguous.”

“And your other hate, Ashtonby; you have two special ones, you know.”

“Is to see it the fashion for pretty women to be up in theology, and *talk* charity.”

“But about your party, may I change my mind?”

“Oh, decidedly,” replied Sir Thomas Ashtonby, “it would be the height of assurance in so humble an

individual as myself, to deny such a privilege to a candidate for a 'double first.' Seriously, though, I am delighted with your change of views in this instance. Appeal to my hospitality, and I soon forget my resentments—an old English virtue;" and rattling on, he cried, "Oh yes, come to-night by all means; I have stumbled over two who will add vastly to our amusement. You have heard of Wilton, of Melton notoriety, and Neville—Neville of the *Blues* we call him—he is a country neighbour of yours, I think. Now I remember he asked me some questions about you, but I have forgotten them. But Wilton is a host in himself, a capital fellow, but a dangerous one to offend, I fancy."

"Your dangerous men to offend are generally dangerous companions, Ashtonby. Anger arising from impulse is bad enough; but when it is made a *profession* of, those on whom it is practised have to joust with a *cool-headed* enemy. I knew Wilton six or seven years ago, and I remember being singularly fascinated by his attentions to me, and thought he could have no equal in manly accomplishments."

"Yes, yes, you formed those opinions in your

hours of infancy. I confess I like Wilton too. I admire his tact, 'unschooled, but wise;' the very fellow to make the feathers pay for the goose, you may rely on it."

"Heed the moral of your insinuations, Ashtonby, that you may not be operated upon," answered Napier. "I own I want to meet Wilton, and hope to profit by your sagacity. But I must leave you now; I have to visit a stranger at the A. yonder," pointing to an hotel. "I suppose he needs my services. I wish I could hand him over to you."

"With all my heart," cried the young Baronet, "I am without amusement for the hour; my cigars are damp, and the billiard-tables run frightfully heavy in weather like this; so follow out your wish, be discreet, and I will have some rare fun. What style of fellow is he? A bumpkin from the country; an animal supposed never to have travelled before beyond the site of his nativity, with shoes and gaiters covered half-way with mud; hands and feet, the only analogy between them and ours being in the number of things called fingers and toes; head developing the amative organs, as Lavater has it, awkwardly held; nose snubby; chin fringed from ear to ear; great shag-

tobacco coloured whiskers, long, lank, and with a little gleam of red, you know; shoulders high, covered with a bright blue or claret coat, short-waisted and glossy. The very man for me, I know their humour well. Do gratify me, Napier, and let me represent you?"

They had reached the hotel to which Napier had alluded; and as Napier knew he could rely on his friend's good offices, if he or the stranger required them, he laughed and said:

"If you would like to accompany me, Ashtonby, pray do so; perhaps I shall find some duty for you to undertake, not unworthy your magnificence."

A few steps took Napier and his companion to the presence of the man they sought. Mr Langton was sitting at a table busily occupied in writing, but when his visitors were announced, he rose from his seat, and at a glance seemed to understand with which he had to do, for he stepped forward with an earnest scrutiny of Charles Napier's face, and observed:

"I hope I have not disturbed you, Mr Napier, by using the introduction given me by Dr Powell. Our mutual friend was most anxious, on finding I

was likely to visit this city, that I should have the opportunity of making your acquaintance."

Napier frankly extended his hand as he said, he hoped his services would be welcomed by the same feeling with which he was disposed to render them.

A grave smile, which was instantly checked, played around Mr Langton's lip as he listened to Napier's words, and then, with the easy and unstudied manner of a man of the world, he directed the conversation to a channel which drew forth from Napier some information relative to the scenes and objects most likely to interest him during his sojourn in the city. After satisfying himself on this head, he excused himself for a few seconds to conclude a letter for the post.

In the bearing of this stranger to the young men who stood by him there was a calmness and decision of manner, guarded from a sense of what was due to others and to the character of the gentleman, that could not fail to make a most favourable impression on those, whose knowledge on points of good breeding was unquestionable. Whilst Langton was sealing his letter, Napier turned with a smile of satisfaction to his fastidious friend, Ashtonby, whose counte-

nance wore a puzzled yet comic expression—he was evidently drawing a comparison between the man before him and his fancy sketch a few minutes previously: however, a few words soon put matters on an agreeable footing, except that Sir Thomas, in place of patronizing and drawing out the clodhopper, as he intended to do, for his own amusement, found himself listening with pleasure to remarks from the stranger, which evinced much taste and feeling, blended with a knowledge of the world. Langton said nothing of “self,” he made no allusion to that—to strangers—most uninteresting individual, that conversational wet blanket.

As *young* men, Englishmen do not excel in conversation now-a-days; a fact, and *I* make no boast of merit in declaring it. Our expressions and opinions may be free of the charge of absurdity or ignorance, if we had really the good sense or taste to leave them *ungarnished* by those fantastic accessories from the page of fashion, which cause, through compliance, the more reasonable of our kind to ask, with a puzzled air, the meaning of terms which quite baffle their comprehension. Englishmen display their selfishness more prominently than any people on the face of the

earth, and thus destroy the true balance of social intercourse. We either talk of ourselves, and from a weak eccentricity parade our faults, and thus unpleasantly burden a companion's mind, or by unmistakable imputation or assumption, seek praise, which, to a reasonable mind, is an insult to its sagacity and delicacy. Sometimes we vaunt a science or taste which our friends know nothing about; they see, however, the indirect sneer at their lack of accomplishment. And again, horror upon horror, we think it (this is a weakness of the head rather than of the heart) the correct thing to speak our minds, to harass the acquaintance of the hour with our full confidence, thus allowing a designing person to profit by this flinging away of our prudence, or a right-feeling one to experience the calamity of being associated with so much weakness and inconsistency. How many troubles would society be protected from, if we would leave "self" alone! But it is useless to talk of what should be, —self is the law of thought and action, and whilst our *own* height is many cubits, and that of our *friends* only a few feet, perhaps we should err on some other point of equal magnitude, if we did not love and admire ourselves a little.

The weather having amended, a walk was proposed by Napier, to which Langton readily assented, Sir Thomas Ashtonby expressing a hope before he withdrew, that the latter would accompany his friend Napier to his rooms in the evening.

When alone with Langton, there was a something in his manner which caused Napier to feel unusual restraint and diffidence. At one minute as a melancholy gaze was fixed upon him, his eye sank, as if it had encountered an influence with which it could not openly deal; and again as Langton relapsed into deep and strange taciturnity, Napier's voice, even to himself, sounded with an emphasis and interest which brought the quick flush to his own cheek. For some minutes, both had been silent; they had strolled nearly to the end of High Street, and Napier was about to make some remark to break the spell, when a gentleman crossed from the opposite side with the evident intention of speaking to one or other of the pedestrians. He paused as he reached Napier, and scarcely noticing Mr Langton, he remarked with the manner of a man rather doubtful about, but not caring for, his reception:—

“Charles Napier, can it indeed be you? but that

I am burdened with a faithful memory, I should not have known you. Well, I am glad we have met, and we are to meet to-night, I hear, by Ashtonby's report. It is a rare boon to a stranger, who has generally to sit in his inn o' nights and battle with ennui, to be surprised with the pleasing intelligence that a host of good fellows are ready to welcome him, to say nothing of having it in his power to renew old acquaintance."

Napier's steady gaze was fixed on the speaker's face, and he paused before he spoke: at last he said:

"I have been trying to follow up the thoughts I used to experience in your society, and memory reminds me of the faith I felt in you in bygone days. Wilton, you are not changed in appearance, though you are in manner. Yes, we shall meet to-night, and I shall be glad to have some chat with you about my brother."

There was a pause; Wilton bent a sharp glance on Napier, *which did not pass unobserved*; he made a short reply, and then passed on, but his features seemed strangely altered.

As Napier turned to speak to his companion, he was startled to perceive a vast change in his countenance. It was cold, stern, and gloomy, and as his

eye turned to follow the individual who had so recently left them, its scrutinizing expression perplexed him not a little. From an impulse he could not control, he said, "Have you before met Mr Wilton?"

With, as it appeared, a violent effort, Mr Langton dismissed the emotion, and replied :

"Excuse me, I am sometimes subject to these abstracted moods. Met Mr Wilton? No, never until to-day; he seems no common individual, evidently well at home with himself; confident and guarded,—immense supports when joined to ability. But as regards this party, if you really think I shall not intrude, I shall be glad to avail myself of Sir Thomas Ashtonby's invitation,—as Mr Wilton says, a lone evening at one's hotel is a *triste* affair."

Napier soon placed his companion's scruples at rest, and after having shown him some of the scenes best worth inspection, he returned to his rooms to finish his arrangements, as he had decided on starting that night for his home. Charles Napier and Mr Langton *had met*: the latter cared little about Oxford now; that was evident, for he decided on returning to Darlington on the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

SHORTLY after the hour mentioned by Sir Thomas Ashtonby, Napier, accompanied by Mr Langton, repaired to his friend's rooms. There were several men present, with whom he was well acquainted, standing near the fire, and generally laughing at some anecdote just recounted by Wilton, whose face was turned from the new comers.

"Gad—a devilish good tale that!" lisped a dandy of a bilious complexion, with long light hair. "I like those well-to-do people to be done: we ought to have an indirect tax upon their purses to compensate for the bore of visiting them. Report says you have been very lucky this past winter, Wilton?"

"Never quote from report, *fair* sir," answered Wilton with a caustic smile: "it may answer in

the provinces, but never in the city. You lead me to conclude—" but here the speaker noticed the addition to the party, and with apt courtesy stepped aside for the host to welcome his guest. But it was not so with his peculiar companion, Neville, the man to whom Warton had alluded, a lieutenant in the regiment in which Wilton had, till his late retirement from the army, held the commission of captain. Though this Neville was a much more recent acquaintance of Napier's than Wilton, the manner he assumed was such as evinces sullenness of disposition or personal dislike. Langton, as a stranger, was introduced to the assembled company, and then the host said—

" You have hitherto been a loyal man, Napier ; but to-night I feared you would prove unfaithful ; for this half-hour by yonder timepiece we have gazed at the door with no result. I proposed to Neville that we should give you an instructive lesson for setting so bad an example, but his answer was desperately obscure."

It would seem that Napier did not hear this remark, as he made no reply, but Langton observed with a light smile—

" Mr Neville, Sir Thomas, is of the world, and

has no doubt learnt that unguarded confidence is open to abuse."

Napier's cheek flushed as this remark fell upon his ear. How could Mr Langton know aught of the relative position of parties? Why should he appear as his champion? or, at all events, address an individual, who was disposed to be hostile, in a tone which evidently implied that he had enlisted himself under Napier's banner? He directed a quick glance towards him, and was even more surprised to see him listening with seeming attention to remarks addressed to him by Mr Wilton.

"Well, well!" said Sir Thomas Ashtonby in reply to Langton, "you are the sufferers after all. We have had a lifelike picture of Paris of last winter sketched by Mr Wilton. By Jove! he says baronets are at a premium there—that a standing order enjoins all English daughters to dance on tiptoe to the beck of a baronet, and on their heads to a lord. But what good is a title to a man, unless it serves as the basis of favour? And Neville has been indulging in sly hints about blue eyes and country roses, consequently leaning to the Arcadian. He must be far gone to prefer the dark hanging woods and shady dells of—what district

Neville wont say—and all that sort of thing, to Tat's corner, or the bay-window at White's."

"You should have prevailed on your friends to have reserved their anecdotes for a later period of the evening," remarked Langton: "perhaps through your interest we shall be favoured with a rehearsal."

"By all means," cried Wilton; "Mr Langton, you see, Ashtonby knows, we army men"—he laughed—"must have encouragement; we are by profession a bashful race, and unable fully to disburden ourselves of national reserve, until something substantial in the shape of gastronomic pleantry enlivens us." The host took the hint, and the party moved away to an adjoining apartment. Either by accident or design, Neville was at his friend Wilton's elbow; his countenance was flushed and angered. "Who is this fellow," he whispered, "who thrusts his oar so boldly in, and half catechizes one with such calm assurance? He must have a lesson taught him before the night has passed."

"Hist!" answered his friend, with a gleam of ironical import from his piercing gray eye. "This is a night of *inspection*, Neville; bear it boldly. *He* is in Napier's interest, and bends a prying

glance upon us ; be upon your guard. I have noticed his mood to-day closer than he thinks ; who he is, I cannot guess."

This was a decided wine party : the table was covered with bottles as varied in their shape and form as the hue of their contents. Nothing was needed to render the affair perfect in its way. Ashtonby possessed a large fortune, and unbounded credit ; and, what was of importance to his friends, he made a liberal use of both. Napier and Mr Langton took their seats together at the table, and it would seem that Neville and Wilton designedly faced them, so that they might share in or overhear their conversation.

Something had certainly gone wrong with Mr Neville : in society he was generally agreeable ; he had acquired the knack of seeming easily pleased, and could exhibit a good-humoured affability, which passed as a warrant for social qualities. But this evening he was not himself : his manner was forced and extravagant. He avoided Napier's glance from the first ; he would not look into his face ; and therefore Napier forbore for a time to press his attention upon him, although he had resolved to do so before the evening was over. The supposition that William Neville was ill at

ease was confirmed by his repeated attacks upon the decanters near him; and when the wine began to tell, he changed from the variable moods I have described to one decidedly reckless and indifferent. He it was who now led the conversation; his neighbour Wilton was rather taciturn at this early period of the evening. A keen sharp glance he treated his friend with from time to time, and more than once a word was whispered in his ear, but the artificial spirit was in the ascendant. Wilton was unheeded—in fact Neville appeared to have dismissed his expressed dislike of Langton, whilst the latter seemed to amuse himself in leading Neville on, and more than once was pleased to help him out of a difficulty when tongue or tact hung fire.

Field-sports—the engrossing topic at a wine party—were freely discussed; the management of horse and hound criticised with a force and seeming ability that would have enlightened our best writers on these subjects. Hunting was paraded as the only sport worthy a gentleman's attention, and the Oxford *drag* unmercifully handled. Some young men who were present writhed beneath Neville's sarcasm on this head; and, in fact, if the company were to believe all that was advanced by Mr

Neville in reference to hunting, he must have been esteemed by them the most daring and enthusiastic sportsman of the day. Langton followed his spirited descriptions of slashing runs with evident interest, but expressed his opinion, when appealed to as to whether he was fond of sporting, "that a boar hunt was a more noble and exciting amusement, taken in its literal sense. In the former recreation there was an animal mighty in his wrath, and not easily to be vanquished, ready to dispute every inch of ground, when the hunter was lucky enough to come up with him, and then it required nerve, hand, and the skill of a practised order, to prove victorious." On the delivery of these views an animated discussion ensued relative to the merits of one description of sport over another. The light-haired youth before alluded to turned the conversation, by declaring that there was no sport like shooting—

"Blackbirds and thrushes," suggested Wilton; at which the butt of his sarcasm writhed a little, but made no retort; however, the sporting conversation flagged, soon taking a turn in which Wilton prominently figured. He had shaken off his taciturnity, and appeared resolved to hold his

own, as he well could, with the best talker at the table.

Napier, and an acquaintance by whom he sat, had been indulging in a cursory review of a work of light literature which had appeared, and which had been highly extolled by the public press as being original. Their opinion had been favourably expressed, at which Wilton was rather astonished, and he then spoke in terms of satire of the lack of original thought in the writers of the present day.

"It is difficult now," he said, "to detect a trace of native thought or new expression in the works submitted to us. Our literary men have not the courage to think for themselves or to rely on their own powers, and therefore they crawl along in the path others have trod before them. The spirit of a host of new books might be squeezed out, if all old ideas and recognised truths were to be cashiered from them. Byron loved Shelley because he could manufacture his metaphysical ideas into English shape, and Shelley disliked English taste because it did not approve of his German metaphysics. Some clever Frenchman once told a friend that he meant to compile a treatise concerning things that had been said 'but once,' but his shrewder friend

answered 'that the work would be a very little one if he did so.' Until lately I fancied Pope was free of the Byronic stain, but after a little research I was wofully disappointed. What will the pious mammas say, when they hear that their favourite lines, in which the dying Christian speaks to his soul in the spirit of practical enthusiasm—my friend B. can give them to you no doubt—(referring to the youth whom he was determined to lash for his inopportune remark in the early part of the evening)—No?—Well, he has forgotten; shame on him at his years! I mean—

'Vital spark of heavenly flame!'

&c. &c. &c. &c. &c.

were positively copied, and without question, from a Pindaric genius of Charles the Second's day. You won't believe me, Napier?—well, judge for yourself:—

'When on my sick bed I languish,
Full of sorrow, full of anguish,
Fainting, gasping, trembling, crying,
Panting, groaning, speechless, dying,
Methinks I hear some gentle spirit say:
Be not fearful, come away.'

Scarron is a great help, too, to Mr Pope, Wollaston, Palingenius, Pascal, Boileau, and others."

"How Scarron?" questioned Napier.

A slight smile of sarcasm flitted athwart Mr Wilton's face, as he said—"Pope exclaims in a very apt quotation, often used by others, and often applicable—

'While man exclaims—"See all things for my use!"

"See man for mine!" replies a pamper'd goose.'

And before Pope thought this, Scarron had written—'Man scruples not to say that he enjoyeth the heavens and the elements, as if all had been made, and still move, only for him. In this sense a gosling may say as much, and perhaps with more truth and justness.'

A light laugh, in which even Napier joined, followed the quotation, and then Napier said—

"Your strictures are too sweeping, Mr Wilton. You maintain that books are obtruded on society with the pomp of novelty, which only contain tedious repetitions of common sentiments, or at best exhibit a change or alteration of known images to give an appearance of originality through some slight difference of dress and decoration. Resemblance between the ideas of authors I allow, but the charge of plagiarism is not to be admitted with equal readiness. A coincidence of sentiment may easily

happen without any communication, since there are many occasions in which all reasonable men will think alike. Writers of all ages have had the same sentiments, because they have in all ages had the same objects of speculation, the interests, the passions, the virtues, and the vices of their fellow-man. These levers of human action have been diversified at different times, but only by unessential and casual varieties ; and we must therefore expect in the writings of those who attempt a portraiture, such a resemblance as we perceive in the pictures of the same artist drawn in different periods of his life. Right and wrong are immutable, and those who attempt to distinguish them, if they all teach us right, must agree with one another. We do not wonder that historians relating the same facts agree in their narration, or that authors teaching the elements of science advance the same theories, but we do question the right of writers, of the style of literature in question, to agree in so striking a resemblance as the passions of mankind. The influence of the passions is uniform, and their effect almost the same in every breast : a man loves and hates, desires and avoids, like his neighbour ; resentment and ambition, avarice and indolence, display them-

selves by the same symptoms in minds distant a thousand years from one another; and therefore the author who assigns to every cause its natural effect, and makes his personages act like others under similar circumstances, does no more than adhere to a general rule, which can receive no alteration as long as 'the natural' is to claim attention. The work we referred to just now has many graceful images and characters of domestic life; these have been drawn before, but never more *clearly* to my sense; and I prefer pictures of this kind to those of war and fury,—to the terrible portraiture, for instance, of Achilles fighting with the rivers, or dragging the carcass of Hector at his chariot-wheels. The natural, to which the writers of the present day adhere, is as true an evidence of genius as the sublime. Shakspeare has given us an original character in his Caliban of the Tempest; but what a brute he has made of him! It is faithfully drawn, and much good judgment is evinced in the representation.

'You taught me language; and my profit on 't
Is, I know how to curse!'—

A rare originality this, certainly! And has Shak-

speare in his Caliban produced either what is *necessary* to enlighten others, or what is *probable*, to give uniformity and consistency to letters?"

Mr Langton here remarked—

"Boileau observes that a new and extraordinary thought is by no means a thought which no person ever conceived before, or could possibly conceive; on the contrary, it is such a thought as must have occurred to every man in the like case, and have been one of the first in any person's mind upon the same occasion: and it is a maxim of Pope, that whatever is very good sense must have been common sense at all times."

"Pass the Burgundy, Neville," said Wilton, in a cool, sneering tone, "and let me dispel the effect of this heavy port." He drank off a bumper, and then said, "Very good sense is common sense, and common sense is very good sense at all times; was it not so, Napier?" But he mistook his man. Some smiled, but Charles Napier did not; he gravely inclined his head and answered:

"May you find it so."

Wilton bit his lip, and seemed to ponder on these few words for some time; at last he looked up with an air of that contemptuous indifference

which I have before noticed, and made some keen and caustic remarks to Neville. He drank freely now, and the true spirit of the man was being drawn out. He was exasperated at Napier's watchfulness of him; he *saw* he was *observed*; he had tried dissimulation, he had delicately probed the feelings of his opposite neighbour, to see if the old good feeling remained. He had been in doubt from the first, for the only basis on which a belief in good will can really exist, is a thorough consciousness of deserving it. Did Wilton merit good will at Napier's hands?—he knew best—his conduct argued that he knew he did not; for now he saw a man before him, who as a boy was so pliant in his hands, watching him with a species of severe curiosity. He worked himself into the humour to regard Napier's conduct in the light of impertinence, for which he resolved to make him smart, had he an opportunity, if merely to prove to him that, if he eschewed *his friendship*, he was ready to meet him on less amiable grounds. Thus Wilton's temper became acrid, and his sarcasms personal and pointed.

Sir Thomas Ashtonby, perceiving a restraint to be creeping over the manner of his party, strove to

gave a turn to affairs, and, after a few words of gay good humour, addressed Langton :

"From remarks which dropped from you this afternoon, I could guess that you were familiar with Indian affairs. Some amongst us have friends and relations of course in that distant field of adventure. Do you think that this present calm in our political relations with the independent princes is likely to continue. Opinions with us in England on this head are as varied as the colours of a kaleidoscope."

Langton seemed thrown somewhat off his guard at this question, but quickly regaining his composure, he answered :

"You have asked me to express an opinion on a very unsettled question, which baffles the sagacity of our most thoughtful statesmen, or our best political economists. For myself, judging by some practical experience, and believing that a war of aggression cannot be a partial war, I am inclined to think that peace in India, like sunshine on an April day in these latitudes, cannot be confidently relied on."

"Since that unfortunate affair in the B. Presidency," remarked Wilton, with the air of a com-

mander-in-chief, "I believe there has been tranquillity. The disaster I mean took place about fifteen or eighteen months ago. Pity the officer in command of the fort should have been so easily duped; but what can be expected, when, through unjust favouritism, or on account of some delicate service, we find rash, undisciplined, young men advanced to command posts of peril and importance?"

For a short space of time Mr Langton was silent, at last he said calmly:

"The officer in command on that occasion is said to have been a prudent and a gallant soldier; though young in years, not so in actual service. It was maintained by those familiar with him, that he had won a reputation of which men of honour are proud. You must therefore err, Mr Wilton, and confound events. Can you call to mind the name of the officer you so harshly stigmatize?"

"Oh, the man I mean was named *Curran*. A mere adventurer, I fancy, exported in his teens from the Emerald Isle."

Such was Wilton's answer, and his eye fell on Napier as he spoke. Charles Napier was hit in a vulnerable part at last. Strong indignant emotion was visible in his countenance; with quivering lip

he was about to speak, when Mr Langton bent forward, his hand resting upon his neighbour's as if by accident, and before Napier could frame a remark, he heard a voice in cold contempt say :

"Mr Wilton," and there was a pause to give emphasis to the rebuke, from the stress laid upon the word, "allow me to tell you, had *you* seen hard service, you would be aware that success does not always go hand in hand with skill and intrepidity. In my prior remark, I did allude to Captain Curran, therefore I must beg you to remember that neither public reports, nor private impressions, are always backed by truth and just regard for due discretion." And Langton turned away as if he wished to drop the conversation ; but Napier was not to be silenced now : with a proud and manly consciousness of right, and with a spirit which revealed the nervous courage of his heart, he thrust back his chair, and, standing before the company, he said in a resolute and indignant voice :

"It would be an ungenerous thing in me to counterfeit an ignorance of names and insinuations even in this mixed company ; and I here publicly declare that the late Captain Curran was my near relative. I say the late Captain Curran, because

there seems no doubt his life was sacrificed in his gallant attempt to regain the post a largely superior force won from him. Now, although until recently I have been in ignorance of the relationship which existed between this brave but unfortunate officer and my family, I do not hesitate, on the authority of this gentleman," turning to Langton, "to stand forward as the champion of his honour, and repel the stigma cast on his position in society."

Many eyes were bent in admiring surprise on Napier. Sir Thomas Ashtonby moved quickly to Wilton's side, and spoke to him in a low energetic voice, to which the latter answered :

"To please you, I don't mind." And then said, "Pardon my ignorance, Mr Napier, of facts, with which you have confessed yourself to be, until recently, a stranger. I will promise henceforth to regard public rumour as base, earthly, and political; a monster deserving to have its tongue twisted off with red-hot pincers. Feeling now, from a spirit of divination I possess, that it has slandered the late Captain Curran, I am ready to go into the field with you—from which he has fled—and do battle for his honour."

Napier noticed the covert sneer which accompanied remarks that could be taken in an aggressive or an apologetic sense, and he was far from being satisfied. He *felt* Wilton meant insult, but as more than one voice whispered he should not push the matter further, he bowed to the decision, and resumed his seat.

Napier kept his seat, though his indignation at Wilton's conduct was excessive; he had still a duty to perform. He felt alone now. Reflection on Langton's dignified and manly vindication of his cousin's conduct bewildered him not a little, it had come so suddenly upon him; he had spoken of that injured relative as if he had been personally acquainted with him, and without question esteeming him as a noble and honourable gentleman. Napier was suddenly roused from his ruminations by the sound of Neville's voice, who was joking of an adventure which seemed to promise him amusement. The substance of it was, that, whilst in the country, he had been so fortunate as to rescue some young and engaging girl from extreme personal peril. The danger he had braved on her account privileged him to renew the acquaintance, which, with smiling assurance, he advised the company, was very

favourably progressing, but that he had been warned off in a way that converted a simple work of gallantry into a labour of positive peril. He added, "The threat of interference being an incitement to a man of mettle, who would wonder at his determination to persevere?"

"Come, Neville," cried Sir Thomas Ashtonby, "explain the nature of this danger to your wooing. Does it come in the shape of an argus-eyed papa, or watchful gouvernante, or, what is more *touching* still, does a hard-fisted rustic rival live near?"

"In this respect, I am rather puzzled," answered Neville; "and hardly know how to class the animal that had the presumption, one fine afternoon, to break in upon my wooing. Certainly he is no resident in the neighbourhood. A dark-visaged, heavy-browed, long-armed fellow, with a thunder and lightning eye—race and breed of the gipsy order, I should say, from his mahogany skin, and from the fact that none but offshoots from that noble stock indulge in the art of divination. 'If we both live,' he tells me, 'he will often cross my path; and when most certain of success, through his good offices I shall be confounded.' And the

canting dog added, 'I should find him the truest friend I had ever known.' You can fancy the amusement this afforded, and especially as the hunting season is so near an end."

Napier pushed back his chair, and rose with an air of weariness; others followed his example, and a general move took place, when he seized the opportunity to speak privately to Neville.

"I have heard that you spent a portion of the past two winters in Paris, or on the Continent. You may have heard that at Vallis we are exceedingly uneasy about my brother's protracted absence and strange silence. Have you met him in your rambles; and if so, could you tell me when and where you last saw him?"

"I cannot give you any information; he was not of our set. I met him somewhere; but when or in what place, I cannot remember just now." Neville's manner, as he thus spoke, was nervous and uneasy, strangely at variance with his former recklessness.

"You forget, my dear Neville; Ashtonby's good wine has made you opaque," said Wilton, who had taken on himself to listen to the conversation; and as he perceived a certain annoyance in Napier's

face at the intrusion, he added, "Overhearing your question to Neville, I have committed a breach of etiquette to do the best I can to satisfy you. Your brother," he continued, "was not altogether of our set. Neville is so far correct. Ill health, to our misfortune, kept him a good deal to his hotel in Paris; but I remember now about the spring of last year he disappeared from the French capital; it was said he had crossed the Pyrenees."

"Of this step we are already informed; but did he not return?" asked Napier.

"Not to my knowledge."

"And did you hear nothing of a man with whom you were once on such friendly terms?"

"Really it did not occur to me to make the inquiries you presume so natural. Had I foreseen your wish, I would have done so. I certainly did hear of an English gentleman having involved some family in Spain—a case, it was said, of seduction, elopement, and finally a hostile meeting which ended fatally to the hero of the affair; but his name was 'Hargrave,' a fashionable one as a *nom-de-guerre*," he added in a musing tone. It was well known to Mr Wilton that Lady Napier's maiden name was "*Hargrave*."

Charles Napier started as if an arrow had struck him. At the instant every gentle gleam of days "long eye" was resumed from Wilton's old memory. He now felt that this man knew much of his family troubles: once before that night his contemptuous sneer as he mentioned the name of "Curran" proved it; and now the full remembrance linking his brother's name in identity with a member of his own family. His first impulse was to cast a look upon him with indignant scorn: but a moment's reflection decided for the better course. With an expression of laughing contempt he met Mr. Wilton's observance, and said as he turned away:

"Thinking my brother shall never so grace a drawing."

A significant glance was exchanged between the two men before they left, and they descended the steps and the gate silently. When they had reached the street, William passed, for a time, watching the snow as it fell in great flakes. He then lowered his head as he moved for the first time in a hurried search for his companion, and he

"I have a great confidence in the

have got that upon our hands which will turn out no joke. We have met our match at last." Wilton turned a cool gaze on his friend, and proceeded to light a cigar.

"With all my heart," was the rejoinder. "The boy has grown into a proper man; he's a mettlesome gentleman—we shall have work upon our hands, I see. But cheer up, Neville, there's fight in him. We must act as we can, when we cannot act as we wish. It is evident that he ——" he paused at an exclamation from his companion:

"'Tis the same fellow—he has just brushed by us, and must have heard our remarks. Look, by that lamp-light—the man who bent more than one look upon us to-night, and spoke, I fancy, words with a double edge. He looked insult more than once, and I'll just have a word with him."

But Wilton detained his half-inebriated friend:

"My good fellow," he said, "by the law, one man has as good a right to pace this pavement as another—such is the democratic creed. 'Tis he, that's evident, but a street row must be avoided. He has had the best of it to-day. The *play* has commenced, Neville; we must get our parts by *heart*." And drawing his companion's arm through his, he took the road to their hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE is a neighbourhood in the west of England, where the country around is broken into shapes of picturesque wildness. In some parts, huge, almost perpendicular rocks, tower along a line of valley for miles, and certain localities are enclosed, as it were, by wooded steeps, sufficiently disunited to admit of habitations, the positions of which suggest to the mind the idea of peace and pastoral comfort. This district is surnamed "Vallis," and the principal residence is embosomed on the western declivity of a slope, open only to the cheering influence of the south and west, which makes it a most agreeable dwelling in the spring and fall of the year.

Vallis House, the residence of the Napiers, was now the scene of sudden and acute sorrow. The head of the family was no more.

In a fine May afternoon, two ladies were seated on a low bench, somewhat removed from the common walk in the Vallis domain. They were mother and daughter: in the air of the former there was much meekness and resignation—an expression which evinced that a well-disciplined mind had exercised a prudent influence over the wayward passions of the heart. It was not thus with the latter: her once bright sunny face was enveloped in the panoply of grief, and though her mother evidently strove to tranquillize her mind, the sorrow of her young heart could not be checked. As I have said, the presence of death had been in the habitation of the Napiers. The head of the household had been summoned away at a time when his ability, and almost more than human foresight, was needed to ward off from a good wife and a promising family the consequences of an error he had committed in the commencement of his career in life. But the hand of death bides not the time of the innocent or the guilty. Its great guide vouchsafes a period for retribution; in His love he sometimes stands in lingering suspense for its fulfilment; but He sets no limit to His forbearance—a chance is given, an opportunity is bestowed,

—an hour, a minute, and it is gone for ever. So it is: we defer what should be the main object of life—the atonement of error—to the future, and suddenly, hardly without a warning, life forsakes us. Procrastination is here the thief of duty. The “Now” is neglected for a remoter period; we forget that if we do not do well to-day, we are less likely to do so on the morrow. He that “now” feels a desire to do right, and wishes to regulate his life according to his reason, is not sure that at any future time he shall be able to rekindle the same ardour; he that has “now” an opportunity offered him for breaking off from wrong, cannot know but that he shall hereafter be more entangled, and struggle for freedom without attaining it. We who have travelled some way along the labyrinth of life, can look back and see how much harm has resulted from a little ill, how vast a trouble has grown out of an error which seemed of little moment at the period of its perpetration. In fact, whilst unredressed, there are no little crimes; each hour they grow, each hour that views them unatoned, confirms and strengthens them in evil.

Lady Napier was left with two sons and a daughter. The elder son, heir to the title and estates,

had been educated, as elder sons are, with wealth and title in prospective. At Eton, Henry Napier was famous for great animal spirits and an excitable disposition; he was usually ringleader in certain little disorderly affairs which occasionally took place. He was a fine animal, even as a boy, a noble promise of gallant manhood. Frank, buoyant, elastic spirit, all eagerness, fire, and impetuosity; friends scarcely thought such attractive traits required a check; and for himself, life was so bright a vision, that he flew like a bird—with a heart as light—from place to place, with the conviction, it seemed, that his occupation on this earth was composed solely of the verb “to enjoy.”

At Oxford, though esteemed a talented fellow enough, he gave small heed to the “dead monitors,” for he became infected in a very short period with the spirit of the place and time. He hunted at least three days a-week, and would head a party with great glee, but with views, it may be supposed, somewhat inimical to the maintenance of tranquillity, and to the protection of the inhabitants of Oxon. He left college with the common success of collegiate sportsmen, and entered a crack regiment. A yearning for enterprise possessed him, but unfor-

unately for the gratification of his romance, we were lapped in the calms of peace, and, instead of shedding the blood of our neighbours, or inciting other powers to do so, we were doing our best—with that kind of foresight peculiar to us—to fill up the rather disagreeable breach made in our own prosperity. Henry Napier was now in the world, and as he practised great liberality of feeling, he had its smile and caress. Who doubts the practice of social benevolence in such a case? The same devilry and humour, when these traits of disposition are supported by position, in the field he now operated in, rendered him a general favourite; the same generosity and daring held the “vulgar” amongst his acquaintance at a distance, and “gentlemen” his most obsequious companions. He was an invaluable addition to the amateur actors of his “corps;” the leader, in a little while, in comic entertainments, and he really performed his parts with aptness and propriety; his buffoonery was decorous—his wit liberal and delicate; in fact, had he not been well provided with cash at the time, he could have made a tolerable income at light comedy. He was admirable as a mimic,—so thoroughly could he control the muscles of his

countenance, and, to give point to humour, vary the tones of his voice, that he could imitate friend or stranger in manner and speech to perfection. This latter accomplishment was indulged in to the amusement of society ; and though there was occasionally a little attic salt in these raileries and drolleries, it was not bitter nor corrosive withal—though a little spoilt, as a generous hearted, handsome young man with large estates and a title in prospective is likely to be,—and as the brightest feature, he possessed an innate sense of nobility and honour, not *always* to be found in characters where the animal existence blooms so vigorously.

Henry Napier's health had been a little shaken from an accident in the hunting-field, and, consequently, it was deemed advisable, some eighteen months prior to my tale, for him to sojourn for a time in a milder climate. He had been enjoined to proceed to Spain or Italy, but he loitered in Paris, and for some time kept up a regular correspondence with his friends ; suddenly, however, his expenditure was greatly increased ; his letters evinced a bitterness of spirit which contrasted strangely with their previous humour and feeling ; and then they abruptly ceased. As month followed month, and

caress. Feminine sensibility had been fostered by an earnest, watchful care. With a true mother's pride and interest Lady Napier had tended her child's education, and her zeal was richly repaid. She was quite a country girl in feeling, knowing neither care nor weariness.

When her father's health failed, and he was compelled to restrict his exercise to the immediate vicinity of home, Mary was his constant companion. The father's death fell with cruel weight on the heart of a child like this. Now he was gone, she could not think with calmness. Every thing around her assumed the complexion of her sorrow ; and the dark shade which impended frightened her young soul from its rest. The silence of *his* room, the gloom over the house, the sense of loneliness within, told her, and she shuddered at the warning voice, that the eloquence of home was mute, its heart gone. With Lady Napier, though suddenly and severely smitten, time sanctified the blow. Nurtured and educated in the country,—married early,—time had been since occupied in the discharge of matronly duties ; her feelings, though earnest and acute, were well-regulated, because they had been wisely schooled. Thus it

was that she could now touch upon that great loss, and labour to release her child from the depression of spirits to which her first great sorrow had subjected her. Duty had become even a more serious obligation than ever now; and as she concluded her gentle soothing, this afternoon, in the seat they had selected, the expression of the young girl's face, as it was turned with affectionate confidence to her mother, said, that those words of reverent trust had not fallen unheeded. Indeed, Mary had commenced, in a faltering voice, replying to this evidence of disinterested love, when a sudden noise broke upon the ear; and almost before an eye could be raised to notice the intruder on their privacy, a young man had stepped over some intervening shrubs, and stood before them.

"It is Charles," said Lady Napier, and her eye rested with a smile of pensive pleasure on her son. Well might a mother's eye rest tenderly on such a son, and her heart feel a spring of pleasure, as his fine intellectual countenance was turned affectionately towards her.

None could gaze upon Charles Napier without feeling that, about that lofty forehead, clear hazel eye, small mouth, and full lip, there was something

apart from the fascination of well-formed handsome features, a treasure beneath ; and yet, the soul of it, talking as it were, to you with a rich natural dignity, with a voice from within, whose eloquence is drawn from that secret sanctuary, wherein the true spirit of honour and truthfulness is enshrined. From his early youth, this young man's mind exhibited traits of high intellectual worth. He was, being a younger son, designed for the bar ; and every facility was given to the development of those powers which bade fair to lead him to honour and distinction amongst his fellows ; but a maternal uncle returned from India, when the boy was fifteen,—he possessed considerable property, and offered to adopt the promising youth, if he was handed over to him ; and after some demur, the old gentleman carried his point.

The worthy uncle promptly decided his plans in reference to the youth. He provided him with a tutor of high intellectual character, whose connexion with the Napiers will be shortly explained, who fostered with prudent zeal his young friend's taste for study ; the latter, in the course of time, was removed to Oxford, where he gained distinction ; and would have added, it was confidently believed, the crown-

ing wreath to his labours, in the form of a "double first," had he not been suddenly summoned away to his father's side, to take that place in the household of Vallis, vacant through the alarming absence of the elder son.

Charles Napier was now in his twenty-third year, though he seemed older, for his manner was formed, and his bearing manly and self-possessed. He was above the middle height, and strong of limb, full of vigour and energy. He had been blest with singularly robust health, and his personal courage was rated of the first order, as he had, in his hours of recreation, performed many gallant feats in the hunting-field: as yet, his nerve had not been put to a severer test.

After he had exchanged some cheerful remarks with his relatives, he observed to his mother:—

"Can you recollect my receiving a message from one *Richard Pearson*, a short time since, begging permission to fish in the streams below, and Colonel Norrie's assurance at our acceding to the desire?"

"Perfected," answered Lady Napier: "what is your reason, Charles, for alluding to the matter?"

"Simply because I am highly gratified we granted this Mr Pearson the permission he sought

for, or assuredly Ralph Neville would have been drowned," was the answer.

"How so, Charles?" questioned Mary, eagerly.

The brother replied,—

"This Master Ralph, who, I suspect, instigated the father to write to me, relative to the liberty we had given this man Pearson over our streams, was in the vale yesterday, amusing himself with his fishing-rod. Having hooked a large fish, it seems in his desire to land it he overreached himself and fell into the water. Farmer Willis tells me he was riding in the uplands when he saw "the Gipsy," as this person Pearson is called, hastening with all speed to the brink of the river, and then tear off his coat and plunge into the water. The farmer galloped to the scene, and found the stranger had just risen to the surface with the boy, to all appearance dead. Bearing him in his arms to land, this gallant fellow stripped him of his wet clothes, and adopted the most vigorous measures to restore animation, in which he was at last successful. Then he wrapped the young gentleman in his own warm fustian coat, and, turning to Willis, said:—

'Farmer, have this youth borne carefully to Mowbray; and should you see Colonel Neville,

tell him, the practice of the Poacher, as he called me, is to return good for evil. This is not the *last* service I hope to render him.' ”

“ What can he mean ? ” observed Lady Napier ; “ he cannot have heard of Colonel Neville’s note to you, or at least its contents. Beside, if he is a stranger here, how was he able to recognise young Neville ? Charles, have you met this individual ? I hear he lives at Farmer Willis’s.”

“ He does,” was the reply, “ but I have not met him ; and have heretofore thought little of his proceedings. He is spoken of as a strange eccentric gentleman, doing good when he sees an opportunity, and harming none. The keepers assure me he is a fair sportsman, though keen ; this his repeated presents of fish prove to us. I am glad he has sport ; better for him to thin the preserve than for others to do so. Certainly his message to Colonel Neville was singular ; ” and for some moments the young man evidently mused over the incident. At last he said :—

“ I must find out Mr Pearson, and see what I can make of him ; he greatly interests me since this gallant act. But now, Mary, I am going to carry you off with me for an hour or two,—shall we

stroll to Roland's cliff, or to the grotto?"—"To the grotto, dear Charles," was the answer; "it seems a very long time since I was there." She said no more, for painful memories were revived. She moved away by her brother's side. No doubt, the thought which drew up that deep sigh was—"A *life* has gone from us since I was there,—it was our favourite stroll."

Yet, if aught in nature could soothe or tranquillize the troubled mind, this season and this day would not speak to the young mourner's heart in vain. A beautiful May-day was just at its close, and nature's own soft music returned thanks to the God of its creation.

Descending a circuitous path, the young people wended their way to the grotto, over which an apartment was tastefully and pleasantly arranged. This grotto had been erected by Sir Eardley Napier to gratify a wish of his wife's. The site on which it stood was one that commanded a singularly attractive view of the country around. They were met by Hannah, the old servant in charge, whose unequivocal delight broke forth in congratulation and inquiry so blended, that Mary Napier could do no more than listen, and passively allow her

hand to remain in the grasp of the simple-hearted being, who wept, she could scarce have said why. At length, Hannah was compelled to seek the keys to give admittance to the visitors. An observer would have seen that Hannah was far from comfortable: still her departure was delayed,—one table had to be dusted, though that day's duty had been duly performed,—then the several articles of adornment were to be readjusted. A chair was not in its place,—the curtains were too much closed; and when these several alterations were completed, a furtive glance was cast around, when, observing her young master's eye raised with eagerness and inquiry, as he stood before an empty picture frame, she cried,—

“ I am in no ways to blame, Mr Charles. I promise you, sir, I see'd to the door every night. Must have been spirited away, I'm sure. And that *one* too—only to think. It made my blood creep, when I found it out. Dear life, to think Miss Julia, the darling I reared in these arms, that few cared about, I be so bold to say, for so many's the long year—should be picked out from all the rest. The Lord protect us, if I *ever* see such things.”

Napier did not answer to the old woman's ram-

bling remarks ; he stood with a countenance of surprise and consternation. At last, he approached the wall, and said,—

“ It is very strange, the portrait has been taken from the frame ;” and lifting the latter, he saw a pencil line upon it. “ It claims a tenderer care,” such were the words, no more ; but it seemed they were sufficient to chase the warm blood from the young man’s cheek, and leave a much perturbed and troubled expression. Mary’s hand was upon her brother’s arm, and with an eagerness unusual to her, she said, pointing to the empty frame,—

“ That was the frame of the portrait that hung in the hall ; and which, when we were children, we used to call the beautiful, strange, lady. And poor Harry always said, when he could find a face like hers, he should love sincerely. It was our aunt Julia, as I have heard ; who, from some family disagreement, left her relatives before we were born, Charles, and never visited Vallis again.”

“ Nigh eight-and-twenty year now gone, Mr Charles, Miss Julia,” Hannah commenced, presuming she must have her say.

“ You can leave us, Hannah,” remarked Charles Napier. His grave tone checked her loquacity,

and she disappeared; and then he turned to the wall, and gazed again upon the pencil line, observing in a low thoughtful voice :

“I removed this frame with the portrait in it, from the house, a few days prior to my father’s death. And, Mary, I will tell you why I did so. One night, about a week or so before my father died, I left my room and stole to his chamber, with the purpose of sitting by his couch. Conceive my astonishment when I found his bed empty. I was about to rouse the household, when I perceived a light in the hall below. I cautiously descended, and saw our poor parent in his night-dress, kneeling by the portrait in question, and his sobs were quite distinct. I could not resist the impulse which prompted me to draw near him, and I strove to remove him to his room. He placed his trembling hand in mine, and with a tenderness of manner I had never known him evince before, he said,—‘ My boy, to ease my troubled soul, here, before the portrait of that injured being, swear to your poor father that you will supply his place, redress the injuries he has done, and never rest until you have executed my bequest in regard to her orphan children.’—I swore to fulfil his injunctions, and he

called me 'the saviour of his honour,' and prayed I should be steadfast in my duty. From that night, fearing the sight of that portrait would revive so painful a memory, I removed it hither, for, as Hannah says, it was the portrait of an aunt of ours, a much injured relative."

He paused; he could not bring himself to enter on the subject of those wrongs; therefore he answered his companion's inquiring glance by saying, "Not now; another time you shall know more—this circumstance greatly agitates me."

From the watchful and almost prophetic character of a child's affection, Mary Napier had concluded some time before her father's death that an unexplained grief was weighing upon his spirits. But she was not the less startled at the event which had just come to her knowledge, though only partially explained; consequently there was something so earnest in the expression of her sweet face, as her eye turned to her brother, that he moved away, unable to bear the scrutiny, and paced the balcony which ran round the grotto.

The incident of the portrait was certainly a strange one. No wonder he was perplexed, and pondered on it with confused ideas. It was an in-

cident he could not fathom. To whom should it be of interest, except the members of his own family? To *her* children—true—but where were they?—One either dead, or sick to the death in a distant land; the other perhaps absorbed in her own griefs, and mourning the infatuation which had led her to sacrifice her happiness and her honour. His brother, too, absent when his presence was so much required.

“A sweet prospect, Charles, is it not?” said Mary Napier, approaching her brother, and standing by him with her hand resting on his shoulder. She spoke with a seeming cheerfulness, for she had noticed his uneasiness of mind, and thus sought to draw thought to another channel. He understood her well, and from a wish to gratify her, he gazed with apparent interest on the varied objects which reposed in the landscape before him.

There was indeed much to attract the lover of the pastoral and the picturesque, though the scene was decidedly un-English in its character. A vale some miles in length was bounded by a ridge of high cliffs nearly covered with trees and shrubs of luxuriant growth and varied hues. In the centre of this vale stood Vallis House. Through the valley ran a deep

winding river, the banks of which were overhung with the willow, horse-chestnut, and lime. The meadows wore the aspect of luxuriant vegetation, and they were tastefully dotted with clumps of beech, and here and there a giant oak towering aloft, and throwing forth its sturdy arms with patriarchal dignity. A very interesting object in the landscape was a small church in the Gothic style of architecture. The river widened considerably on its approach to the neighbourhood of the house—no doubt through artificial means—and presented the features of a small lake, in the centre of which an island had been formed, and which had received much care and cultivation. The cypress, willow, rhododendron, and Portugal laurel variegated the banks and neighbourhood, serving as a no slight appendage to the chaste structure in the midst of this chosen spot. To this little church the Napier family repaired, as they were at a great and inconvenient distance from the parish place of worship. A Mr Wilmott was now the officiating clergyman, and he resided with the family. He had been a fellow-collegian of Sir Eardley Napier's, and the personal friend of Mr Warton, with whom he had likewise been contemporary. In early life Mr Wil-

mott's means had been limited : he was called on to exercise frugality and prudence. Sir Eardley, in his college career, had, from the eccentricity of genius, maintained a friendly intercourse with some sedate and studious men of his standing at the university, amongst whom was Mr Wilmott. He consequently spent some portion of his time at Vallis, and it ultimately happened that Mary, the gay baronet's younger sister, resigned her heart to his worth and excellence. Mr Wilmott had an explanation with Sir Eardley, and spoke cheerfully of being able in the course of time to place himself in an independent position. This was all the *careful guardian* required, and when this pledge was redeemed, the affair was to receive serious consideration.

For three years Mr Wilmott toiled hard and eagerly,—his was a rare incentive, and he took a proud standing amongst the learned and the wise of his university. High honours were virtuously earned, and then a living in the gift of his college, of considerable emolument, fell to his lot. All difficulties were removed; in a worldly light, the prospects of Arthur Wilmott needed no augmentation from fortune. His fine heart throbbed with delight,

only known to characters of his mould, when he received the warm congratulations of his friends, amongst whom Lady Napier was foremost and most sincere. He left his betrothed, feeling as the good man feels when this world's most valued hope is nigh realization, to take possession of his living—to prepare his home—*their home!* Three weeks had passed. One more and he looked for his reward. The hours were all but counted, when, alas!—and, alas, that such should often be the inscrutable decree of destiny!—intelligence came that he must hasten to Vallis, not to attend his dear betrothed to the altar, but to the tomb. Truly was the faithful, living, heart alone. How terrible must be such loneliness! The elements of material happiness all blotted out. He had stretched out a hoping hand to take only one rare flower from human nature's garden, and, as he was placing it in his breast, its blossom sank to the dust. The spirit of his hope and dream was dead. In her last moments, the dying girl prayed of her brother care of *him*; she felt he would be desolate. Sir Eardley promised, and in this instance he was faithful to his charge. Mr Wilmott's ambition seemed gone. Energy was lost, and so was hope. He resigned that for which

he had so diligently laboured into another's hands. He *felt* he could not perform his task righteously, and he was not one to falter in his duty. He lived on at Vallis. *She* had lived there. He could not tear himself away. In the little church close by, she had aided his efforts with her prayers ;—there, had it been willed, they would have been united. Such facts are simple—experience knows them well!—the end of hopes and life's enthusiasm. Still around the most withered branch 'tis not an uncommon thing to see the lichen thrive and prosper. Sorrow exacts a heavy tax, and yet 'tis a good politician. Suddenly there was a demand made on Mr Wilmott's generosity. Mr Hargrave returned from India ; he had neither wife nor child ; he adopted our young friend Charles, but he was to be removed from Vallis. Wilmott was soon known to this old man ; he learnt his history too, and the old bachelor respected what he could not exactly understand. With the world's stern prudence and wisdom, Mr Hargrave strove to draw Wilmott away from the place of such melancholy reminiscences, but to no avail, until the educational scheme respecting Charles Napier was discussed. This youth Wilmott had always liked ; he had even al-

ready taken an interest in him. We grow to love what we tend, even if it be a withered plant, and Wilmott at length subscribed to Mr Hargrave's wishes, and took upon himself the charge of Charles's education. As the boy grew, and was removed to college, Mr Wilmott returned to Vallis. Time and occupation had had a good effect; he solicited the office he held at this period of my tale, busied himself in active charity, with a quiet modest perseverance, and bore throughout the vale the name of "good Mr Wilmott."

CHAPTER V.

" I SEE your attention is drawn to the same object, Mary," observed Charles Napier, as his gaze embraced the river before him. " That individual fishing yonder must be the man, who rendered Ralph Neville such good service yesterday. He seems vastly taken with his pastime,—still, I am certain, I have seen him cast more than one furtive glance this way ; and he must be conscious of our presence. I will go and speak to him."

" Do, Charles," answered Mary Napier. " I will wait here for you ; I feel quite an interest in a person who behaved with such prompt courage ;" and as her brother descended to the river to execute his purpose, she again fixed her eyes on the fisherman, who was still busy at his work. " Have I not seen that figure before?" she said ; " the rude attire,—that masculine energy of gait. Yes; on the

day of my poor parent's burial he was amongst the tenantry. But how could that be?" Still Mary pondered on the incident. After a short delay, Charles Napier returned to the balcony; the first words were, "You have spoken with him, Charles; is he the individual we surmised."

"He is," was the answer: "as you must have observed, he was conscious of my approach. I thought he seemed inclined to shun me; but, as I hastened on and accosted him, he spoke as a man who was forced to submit from necessity rather than from a feeling of pleasure. He thanked me in a rough, hoarse, voice for the sport he was enjoying, and then he was silent. I scanned him with some curiosity, for he is a very singular person, and in spite of his coarse fustian dress, rough straggling red hair, copper-coloured skin, and mustache which quite covers his mouth, I *feel* that he must be a gentleman. I tried to get him to converse with me, but he only answered in monosyllables, never raising his eyes from his occupation, until I spoke of his gallant rescue of Ralph Neville. Then, as he pulled his large felt hat still more over his countenance, he said, 'Neville! Neville! I have no cause to love that name, but I could not let the lad die the death

of a drowned rat *without putting forth a hand to save him.* He strode down the bank and crossed the river, wading through the deep water, to disentangle his line from a root to which it had become attached, whilst his attention had been distracted by me."

"A strange speech certainly," said Mary Napier, a thoughtful shade overspreading her sweet face; and her brother, after some minutes' reflection, remarked, "*There is something altogether extraordinary about that man.* You know my old theory, Mary, about attraction and repulsion; and on my word, in standing by that Mr Pearson, I felt I could place entire confidence in him, although I have never spoken to him before, and even now have not seen a single feature of his countenance distinctly. Do you know, even his silence, at which another ought to have been annoyed, had the greatest significance in my eyes. I felt interested in his most trivial act, and yet experienced a sensible thrill within which puzzled as much as agitated me." After another short silence, he added, "I cannot say what it is, but *there is something in that strange man's behaviour that brings poor Harry forcibly before my mind.* Poor Harry! poor impetuous

Harry! many times in the field and by the river have I seen him act with the same cool daring—with the same disregard of danger."

As the evening was drawing on, Charles Napier thought it expedient to return with his sister to the house. There was a marked seriousness on his brow as he re-entered the room, and his eye rested on the empty picture frame, and again his thoughts reverted to the individual with whom he had spoken a few minutes before. "Can this be he of whom William Neville spake," was the idea, "during his tirade in Ashtonby's rooms, on the night of my departure from Oxford? If so, the fishing mania serves to cloak some private object."

He left the apartment, but stopping as he met "Hannah" on the steps beyond, he again questioned her relative to the disappearance of the portrait. "All I can say, Mr Charles, is, that I missed it yesterday, and I was going up to the House this very afternoon to tell you about it. Nobody comes here, you know, sir,—only one person, that good gentleman that lives at Farmer Willis's, has crossed the threshold for many 's the long day now."

"What! Mr Pearson, Hannah? does he come here?" asked Napier, quickly.

"I am sure, Mr Charles, I thought there was no harm in giving him liberty to sit up there for a little bit, he was so kind-spoken; and only last week, when poor George Coleman broke his leg, he went to the cottage and left money, and generous words to comfort his poor sick wife. There isn't a soul in the Vale but would stand up for his honesty. You, Mr Charles, he does come and sit here, and he was here a few days ago; he seemed in trouble like; I thought I heard a groan, and I peeped in at the door, and, deary me! he sat in the great chair without his hat, and if ever I see Sir Reginald as he was a-going to the wars, your grandfather, Mr Charles I see'd him then. Shall I tell him he musn't come here no more?"

"If you say so in those words, he will surprise you by evening, Hannah," answered Charles Nance; "but let him come as he likes; your alarm is all his fault, it is no wonder you. Let us say no more about it. If you are sure in this vein, it is all his fault, and I am sure that the good Valley is a better place for him, and the superstitious will be glad to see him, and you will know."

"The best of all is the good people," said Charles, "and the good people are the best."

"They all say hereabout that poor Sir Eardley, my honoured master, has been with 'em more than once since the dark night of his burial; and that these very nights I heard his voice I know. I went down the grotto steps, and that good gentleman was sat there all alone. I told him I was skeared-like about the voice, and he said he shouldn't wonder if I wasn't right; he had heard it too, and was *watching*, but that I had better leave him alone.— And oh! Mr Charles, he spoke quite awful like; and I knew he believed a spirit was coming to him."

The young people had not proceeded far on the road homeward before they saw Mr Wilmott resting against an ash tree situated at a bend in the narrow path. The greeting was cordial; at a glance it was evident that a bond of much closer interest than worldly acquaintance existed between this solitary man and the Napiers. He was standing at the verge of a ledge of rocks; his countenance was serious, though animated, and he looked as if he thought good things, and obtained comfort from them. On the approach of his young friends, he turned away to accompany them homeward, and Mary's arm rested on his. For a short period neither broke the silence. Wilmott seemed absent

of mind, or reflective : more than once he cast his eye towards the west, and all but paused in his walk ; at last he observed, in a quiet, earnest tone : " I love this hour. Creation, on such an evening, wears a hallowed, saint-like air. He who wishes for instruction should be diligent now. I never gaze upon the setting sun without feeling its power to attract. My nature yearns towards it, and my soul seems to say to it : ' Light me across the mighty cataract,—night may come, when I shall feel less confidence.' "

" My thoughts were of a different complexion," remarked Mary Napier, in a low, feeling voice. " I was reflecting how that tyrant Death, to whom you indirectly refer, had eclipsed our sunshine, and how dense the intervening cloud that hung between us and former happiness."

" I did not intend to open that sad wound, dear friend," said Wilmott, speaking very kindly ; " but since you give me liberty of speech, I must ask you to remember that whatever stumbling-blocks we encounter in our short passage through this life, are placed in our way by One whose will is wise, though His decrees may seem severe. By comparison, life may be estimated as the duration of

this flower," pointing to a wild rose near him ; " a thought which every nation has heard warbled in its own tongue, from the inspired poets of the Hebrews to our own times ; we feel its justice, every hour confirms its example, and should we not embrace its precept ? "

" I have tried hard to look upon our loss with fortitude," answered Mary Napier, with a quivering lip ; " but my poor heart is very weak. At the loss of a parent a child's heart has reason to fear, for its stay is gone. Oh ! there seems nothing in the catalogue of human misfortune so bitter as the fact of such a bereavement. "

" Few have lived to my age, who have not experienced the loss to which you allude, dear Miss Napier," answered Wilmott, gravely, " and know the grave to be the principle of many harsh and painful themes ; still it is not well to make the thought of death the vehicle of desponding utterances. Nor should we encourage the feeling to look on the dark side of affliction ; for, notwithstanding we are inclined to believe our individual trials more severe than our neighbours', I agree with a sound writer, who says, ' that if the human family, in their respective stations, consented to

cast their sorrows into a heap, and to abide by a subdivision, there would be much dissatisfaction afterwards; most would confess they had not profited by the bargain.' And I know there is consolation ready for every one, if sought in a right spirit, proportionate with the burden to be endured. I have known much bitter earthly trial in my time, dear friend,—a trial from which may you be protected, for it is of a harsh character,—perhaps the greatest of trials that can afflict the human heart.

"Time was," he said, after a moment's pause, "when your grave pastor speculated in hopes of earthly felicity. He loved as the true heart can only once love, and was honoured by a noble woman's undivided affection; but it pleased God to deny them human bliss. A cloud came between him and the sunlight; the hardy pine could not avert the storm from the sweet flower that bloomed but a fleeting season at its base. For his sake now she grieved to die,—she sorrowed for his woe; but the voice was suddenly hushed by death." He paused for a while, for his voice faltered. "His was not a disposition at that time to endure patiently. His hearburnings were very bitter. His only earthly hope was gone,—he had built all on it. His fate

was that of a prisoner who had been sentenced to a mine, and had, after great toil, alighted on a gem which would purchase his liberty; when in the night a thief stole upon him and robbed him of the jewel. For a period he lived thus, and so inflamed the wound, that life was all but sacrificed. Then better thoughts came, though the aspect was sadly changed, and time softened the anguish of his sorrow. As he reflected how thin the partition was between this world and the world beyond, he became more reconciled to his appointed lot of suffering, and bowed to the purpose of an overruling Providence. This faith has supported him. He walks forth on an evening like the present, and notes the varied changes in nature, and these multitudes of proofs of His watchful guardianship bid him remember Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

Mary Napier was evidently acutely touched by this confidence; a sympathizing tear started forth, as her eyes were raised to her old friend's countenance.

"What was her name?" she said, scarcely above a whisper. "Tell me, that I may blend it in my

prayers with the names of those to whom memory fondly clings."

"Has my secret been so faithfully preserved?" answered Wilmott with emotion. "You have, however, been taught to love her memory, for she was your nearest relative."

"My aunt Julia!" said Mary eagerly. "I never hear the name without experiencing a thrill of fear, blending with a strange curiosity. But no; I am wrong in my conjecture," seeing Charles gravely shake his head.

"No; not your aunt Julia," remarked Wilmott; and as his eye noticed Charles's uneasiness, he only added: "Her trials were of a different character. You bear your younger aunt's name, and to her I alluded."

Mary was taken by surprise; but, on reflection, this feeling wore away. Mr Wilmott's interest in them,—his finely-toned and sensitive regard,—his tenderness towards herself, were all explained. Each person of this little party seemed occupied with their own thoughts. No further remark was made, until they had reached a point which opened on the road leading to the house, when Napier exclaimed,—

"An equestrian in the private path! Ha! it is Colonel Neville," and hastened on to meet the horseman. The meeting was more than cordial. The manner assumed by Colonel Neville towards the young man evinced a much more earnest feeling than arises from mere conventional interest. Colonel Neville was a near neighbour of the Napiers, a personal friend of Sir Eardley's, and our friend Charles's godfather.

In age, Colonel Neville was perhaps something over sixty years. Once he was a tall, powerful man, with a firm, erect, and soldier-like carriage,—courteous and dignified in manner, somewhat characteristic of days now gone, such as we *now* designate as belonging to the "old school." The features of the face were fine, but the expression was severe; the eye gray and piercing; intellect was marked on the brow in plain characters; and the forehead was so massive, that it might be thought there must be a host of great thoughts there; but then the haughty carriage, together with the firm mouth, said clearly that human pride was not yet conquered. A deep gash from the cheek upward on the left side of the face, did not detract aught from his noble appearance,—it rather became

his martial air. I have said he was once tall and of powerful form. Such I remembered him five years prior to my tale, when I saw him rise in his place in parliament, and deliver a powerful and eloquent speech. My slight sketch of him would be more applicable then than now. At present there are furrows of care upon that massive brow, signifying that some bitter trial had overtaken him. His air and bearing caused the impression that he was acutely suffering from some mental affliction. The settled melancholy about him hardly originated from physical infirmity. A smile, to the untroubled mind the music of a passing, pleasing thought, left a quiver on the lip, an evidence of mental pain ; in fact, he was a vast contrast now to what he was. After a passing remark, this gentleman observed to his companion :—

“ Charles, can you remember my note a few days since, wishing you to be less liberally disposed towards a man of the name of Pearson ? I have cause to be grateful that you acted contrary to my wishes.”

“ I have heard of the service he rendered your son, Colonel,” replied Charles Napier. “ It was a gallant act ; he hazarded his life to save the drown-

ing boy. I think you cannot do less than agree with me that we must give him a life interest in the sporting way. It must be delicately done, however, for you have touched his *amour propre*."

"So it seems," said Colonel Neville; "and I must tell you I received an odd message, proving that he affects something like indignation. But really when a man places himself in an anomalous position, he should not be so very thin-skinned on account of opinions entertained about him."

"But are these rumours to which you allude, Colonel ——"

"Oh! some are that he has the gift of second sight, as the old folk term the gipsy accomplishment of telling what has been and what will not be. He professes disinterested service throughout the Vale, and has taken the idle and the vicious under his protection. Somehow or other, he has picked up information relative to our family affairs. Only last week he rescued a lad who deserved sound chastisement at my keeper's hands, saying, 'Confine your tyranny to Mowbray; you shall not practise it on the lands of Vallis.'"

"Words, dear Colonel, mere words," said Charles Napier, good-naturedly; "and no doubt repeated in

a sense quite opposed to their real meaning. Your opinion, you know, has a great deal of weight hereabouts, and you have expressed it to his disfavour ; and a man in a dubious position is less likely to forgive contempt than even a positive injury."

"Well, well," was the rejoinder, "I see you are disposed to admit his social as well as moral qualification to sentimentalize. I will repeat your opinion to Ellen ; she has already exalted him into a hero of romance, and calls him 'the Knight of the Glen.'"

"Miss Neville is well, I trust," observed Napier, with some restraint of manner. "It is long since we have had the pleasure of seeing her at Vallis."

"True, Charles, true," replied his companion mournfully. "I fear her brother has a hand in it. I must inquire into this estrangement. Heaven knows we have need of friendship ; and that of Vallis house has always been sincere."

"Has Mr Neville been in the neighbourhood lately ?" asked Charles Napier.

"His regiment is quartered at S——," answered the father. "And I fear he has obtained an interview with Ellen ; for between him and myself all

intercourse has ceased—a bitter confession to make,” added the old man sadly.

“I hope the bitterness will be dispelled through a speedy reconciliation,” remarked Napier with hesitation ; for he was awkwardly situated.

“Never, never,” said the father gloomily. “The season has gone by ; he has no heart left,—no moral courage.” There was a pause ; Napier’s delicacy of feeling would not admit of comment. He knew that William Neville had been a rebellious son. His own father, too, had once warned him against intercourse with him, regretting that the position of the two families was such as to preclude a candid explanation.

Colonel Neville bent an inquiring eye on his companion’s face, as he said :

“You have a good deal to make you serious, Charles ; there must be no secrets between us—I will come to you shortly, and talk matters over with you.—Now I will turn my steps to Mowbray—I am in no mood for society to-night ;” and rejecting the young man’s invitation to enter the house, Colonel Neville turned his horse’s head homeward.

Though night was fast drawing on, Colonel Neville pursued a slow and measured pace—his

if you will break off the connexion which exists between you and the individual for whom this sum is intended."

"And whom you placed by me in my early youth to guide my inexperience, to instruct my ignorance," cried the son, in a tone of bitterness.—
"It is impossible; I cannot comply with your wishes, at least not now."

"Not now!" reiterated the father in severe tones.
"William, this indecision, this procrastination in doing what you know to be right, has ever been your bane. You are ever unwilling to begin amendment. Show me you strive to redeem the past, that you will not consign yourself without further struggle to voluntary ruin, and I will aid you as you wish."

"It is too late," was the rejoinder, in a voice which the father might have mistaken for dogged hardihood; "I have lost the authority to befriend myself—I cannot change now."

"Then go forward in your career of crime; I will not tacitly countenance villany. Plot and scheme; be still the tool of that arch-fiend Wilton—act as you will, through concession of mine you shall not receive further evil license, nor be placed in a posi-

tion to prosecute some infamy you have in hand." Before the younger man could reply, a female figure glided timidly to the horseman's side, and, with upraised hands, solicited forbearance:—

"Father, father, be not so hard upon him; give him your hand. Father, he is your son, speak less sternly, and he will implore your pardon." The old man's lip quivered, his hand rested on the head of the sweet pleader by him; he bent his face, almost to a level with her own, and said:—

"Dear Ellen, your warm impulses mislead you; your pure mind cannot correctly judge between us. To the house, my child; your inexperience prompts an imprudent zeal."

"The impulse which prompts me to urge a reconciliation between you and my brother, dear father, cannot be an erring one, nor can it be imprudent," answered the daughter. "William, speak one word; your father will not turn his face from you, I have heard him say."—She turned to catch her brother's eye, to take his hand. Poor girl, her charitable intentions were cruelly frustrated. She saw him for whom she had once again braved her father's censure, beating a retreat in a contrary direction to his former home.

Colonel Neville's eye followed his daughter's; he sighed heavily as he alighted from his horse, and drew the young girl's arm through his. Then he said, in an uneven yet soothing voice, for he deeply sympathized in her emotion,—

“You see, my child, there is no hope—stern reality. Do not in future attempt to step between us.” A poorly stifled sob was Ellen Neville's sole response.

CHAPTER VI.

MOWBRAY PARK, the country residence of the Nevilles, was situated about two miles from Vallis House. The site on which the mansion stood, together with the country around, presented an entirely different character to the scene sketched in a former chapter. There was less of the picturesque and romantic in the situation of Mowbray than in that of Vallis House, but there was more regularity and expanse in the grounds. The mansion itself, of imposing appearance, was larger than its neighbour Vallis, but not in such good repair. Mowbray had been deserted during Colonel Neville's early career. His town-house had engrossed his presence, and we all know that it is the eye of the master, and the practical judgment of the good landlord, that keep the old ancestral hall and domain in order and dignity. The interior of the mansion, however, was fitted up with great taste, and comfort was

conspicuous throughout. This had been effected through the judgment and ability of Ellen, who had, during the three years she had been mistress of her father's household, worked a vast change in domestic arrangements. It was singular that the daughter of such acknowledged votaries of the world of fashion, as Colonel and the Lady Adelaide Neville had been, should have given so early an indication of possessing that domestic taste, which is a talent of great price to the woman, and the means whereby she receives a most refined pleasure through the comfort she ensures to others.

Would you learn, dear reader, how it came about that the disposition of one, who you will love before long, became fixed in so true a direction, at so early a period, in spite of disadvantages which beset her? It was in this wise. During the little girl's lengthened visits at Vallis House, sometimes protracted for months, she was fortunate to obtain the earnest friendship of the exemplary Lady Napier, who, watching the disposition of her young guest, and regretting, as she perceived how little real intrinsic education had been regarded, steadily and with an affectionate zeal sought to direct the mental capacity to a healthy channel, and mate

the sensibilities of an earnest, enthusiastic, nature with them. Of course, the only daughter of so fashionable a mother as the Lady Adelaide Neville, wanted not for instruction, so far as was essential for the "making up" of a child worthy of her. The accomplishments of the day were early learned, —an hour to Italian, another to German, and two to French, comprised the morning's work; and the progress Ellen made in music and drawing, drew forth much admiration and flattery, which the proud mother backed by affectionate caresses. Still it was a false affection, and pride was of the wrong sort, though it is the fashion to say, "it must be excused." It was not that the mother was proud, because the fashionable world spoke of her daughter, as one likely some day to make a great sensation and a brilliant alliance: beyond the fact of her child's talent and beauty being of utility as matters of embellishment to the lady of fashion on her introduction to the gay world, I fear the fashionable mother thought not.

Three years passed; the child had grown into a sweetly interesting girl; the house of mirth had changed to one of mourning; a bitter domestic calamity had toppled down the pride and social

consequence of the Nevilles. The father retired from the world : he took his young daughter with him, but regarded her quite as an additional source of anxiety ; when, much to his astonishment, in place of being irritated by having to contend against that waywardness and irregularity of disposition which he expected in a child educated as he supposed, he saw that she was, with an unselfish sweet wisdom, kindly labouring to alleviate his sorrow, and fill to the best of her ability the place allotted her. It was a rare discovery for him : suddenly, and from a source he least expected, a gleam of sunshine pierced the murky atmosphere, which shadowed the house of Mowbray.

Ellen Neville was indeed a most engaging person ; but hers was a peculiar beauty, a beauty attractive to the intellectual eye. With Ellen, though the symmetry of feature was correct, a person, who only bestowed a passing glance upon her, would not perhaps think her deserving a second scrutiny, particularly if that dark, deep blue eye were partly veiled by the long black lashes ; but if, during that fleeting inspection, a call had been made upon the soul within, and the genius of her heart awoke, then the delicacy and feeling of the

expression gave the face the character of something so spiritually pure and lovely, that the thought would be, an angel passing by had rested for a moment on her brow. The face was pale, and trouble had chastened the expression ; I might almost say that to trouble Ellen Neville owed the rare beauty which she possessed. In figure, Ellen was slightly above the middle height ; her form symmetrical and graceful. Her hair was most luxuriant, of the darkest brown, and worn in plain bands, giving a fine outline to the classic bend of the neck. The complexion of the face was pale, yet there was a *warmth* in this delicate hue, which preserved it from the supposition that it arose from ill-health. In the clear brow and forehead ; the latter rather broad than lofty ; there was the expression of the mind, fruitful of truth and vigour of intellect. I shall not indulge in a more lengthened description of this sweet girl : descriptions of this character are seldom successful in impressing on the reader what is really meant, particularly in a countenance whose great charm is "expression,"—it must be *seen* to be felt, and *felt* to be understood.

All who had a claim on Ellen Neville's regard, and from the charity of her heart there were many

pensioners on her list, met with consideration and interest. No cottager, who needed aid, but shared in her practical virtue: when she was seen amongst the poor and lowly, all knew the purpose of her visit, and approached her with the cheerful reverence of voluntary servitude.

I have given the reader a slight insight into the position of affairs at Mowbray, but I must be allowed to take a retrospect, and explain the reason of the unhappiness and confusion which existed in this family; but, to do so, I must give a brief sketch of Colonel Neville's career.

George Neville, the present head of the house, entered the army at an early age, at a time of action and busy war. Before he was twenty-one, he had greatly distinguished himself, and was regarded as an ornament to his profession. He was then a second son, and therefore had to work his way, which he did bravely, but returned home on the sick-list soon after. He was recommended to winter in Italy, as there was no immediate demand for his services, and he complied with the advice. He was at this time two-and-twenty years of age. An acquaintance of his family, returning from Naples, reported that Captain Neville had en-

tangled himself in some love affair, and had fled with a lady of high position in society to the Isle of Cyprus. Whether this tale was true or not, his friends had no opportunity of ascertaining; for, when the young officer's leave of absence expired, he was found at his post ready for service. He was perhaps somewhat altered in manner, less lighthearted and frank, morose at times, and inclined to rail at the inconstancy of woman; but he neither allowed himself to be questioned relative to his proceedings in Italy, nor did he volunteer an explanation.

His worldly position, about a year and a half after his return from the Continent, was much altered through the sudden death of his elder brother. The young soldier was now heir to a fine property; a very different man, indeed, in the eyes of the farsighted world to what he had been. There were no more whisperings amongst the dowagers of fashion that Captain Neville was a very sad person, &c. &c. He was suddenly "an interesting, promising personage," with a clear estate, smiled a cynic by, of ten thousand a-year, to gild his virtues,—he was, indeed, a most approved of man. However, the young officer seemed

in no hurry to contract an alliance. He spent a great portion of his time with his regiment, with a heart, to society it appeared, quite case-hardened to female fascination.

Major Neville at last, when about thirty years of age, deposited his life-interest in happiness in the keeping of a highly accomplished and fashionable lady, a member of a noble house of French extraction ; but within a year of this union, his regiment was ordered to the American frontier. Many of the wives of the major's brother officers followed the expedition, but the Lady Adelaide was not of the number. Her health, she thought, was not sufficiently robust to admit of her undergoing hardship or fatigue. After a lapse of three years, the gallant officer returned invalided to England with the rank of colonel. The gash observed in his left temple, received in a severe engagement, consigned him a prisoner for a time ; and when an exchange was effected, his health had so greatly suffered that he was induced to retire from active service. This decision was no doubt strengthened from the fact of his having, at the death of his father, come to the possession of the large property to which he had been heir.

During her husband's absence, the Lady Adelaide Neville had taken up her residence in London, as she found more diversion in the gay metropolis than in the obscure country-house which her husband had provided for her. Society of the outer world seemed from the first quite essential to her happiness. From the early period of her marriage, she devoted time and talent almost exclusively to the shrine of fashion. Thus occupied, it may be supposed that Lady Adelaide Neville paid small personal attention to nursery government. She had given birth to a son some two months prior to her husband's departure for America, and of course the appointments were complete; but the mother's eye, or rather the mother's deep solicitude, was wanting. On Colonel Neville's return from America, his state of health required repose, and he was, consequently, ordered to his country residence. The family migrated to Mowbray. Though for a period the Lady Adelaide seemed reconciled with the change, as her husband's health improved she became ill-pleased with this isolation. Strange guests and visitors flocked to Colonel Neville's residence, and soon the country-house became as much

the recipient of fashion as the town one had been. Her relatives were constant in their attentions ; and one, a youth of twelve years of age, or thereabout, was domiciled under her roof.

Though it might be surmised, from this slight sketch of affairs, that the Lady Adelaide Neville was more exclusively occupied in the advancement of her own interests and pleasures than was agreeable to an independent and proud husband, still her conduct did not altogether annoy him in the social reading. He, too, was ambitious, therefore inclined to court public opinion ; and as he became aware of the influence he obtained through the position his accomplished wife supported, he tacitly countenanced their mode of existence. It cannot be said, however, that Colonel Neville and his wife possessed congenial minds—their tastes did not assimilate.

Colonel Neville's character, in a worldly sense, stood deservedly high. He was far from a commonplace individual. The demands upon his time for the first four years of his married life had stood in the way of home companionship : thus that heart understanding, which is the basis of connubial happiness and confidence, was never learnt. Husband

and wife in the outset were apart, and sentiment was widowed even before sorrow or sickness came.

To follow, step by step, the career of Colonel Neville and his wife for some years would be tedious, and of small utility to my history: suffice it that at their home routs followed revels—they knew well life's "hack sights and sounds." Their expenditure was great, and their tastes extravagant. A few words more—After-events proved that Colonel Neville did not entirely share in his wife's tastes. Perhaps it would be injustice to his masculine vigour of intellect to say that, even at this period of his life, he lived in the happy ignorance of duties his position entailed upon him; still, like many situated as he was, he stopped a little, and again a little while, before he sought to excite his faculties to a more healthy action. Gaiety has its charm, and when a man pursues it he plunges into a current, whose course is difficult to stem.

At the period to which I allude, horse-breeding and racing were a fashionable pursuit. Colonel Neville followed the fashion,—bred many good racers, won several good matches, and as a turfite his reputation was high. This fancy was a very expensive one, and as he was too confiding, he found

his expenditure increase in ratio with his success ; so that common sense, jogging his elbow, bade him "hold hard" before the evil was past remedy.

I have alluded to a youth who was domiciled at Mowbray on Colonel Neville's return from America : this boy was named Louis Wilton. An explanation of his connexion with the Neville family could not find a more appropriate place than the present. He was, it was said, the son of the Lady Adelaide's only brother, Lord D'Argentin, by an Italian lady, to whom he had attached himself during his travels in Italy. Such was the belief, but it was an erroneous one. The facts are these. The Lord D'Argentin, whilst cruising in the Mediterranean, touched at the Isle of Cyprus some twelve years or so prior to the period to which I revert. During a brief visit he learnt the interesting and romantic history of an afflicted Italian lady, who lived in strict seclusion in the town in which he had taken up his temporary residence. The tale was, that, some six months before his visit, the lady, in the company of an English gentleman, had arrived in a small yacht from the coast of Italy. It would appear that these fugitive lovers lived happily for a time, when, unfortunately for

their peace, a French officer formed their acquaintance. It was soon whispered to the Englishman that his friend was false, and designed a conquest of his lady's heart. The young man took small notice of the insinuation, and followed his usual morning exercise with his gun in the country around. However, it happened that an accident to his fowling-piece compelled him, shortly after this rumour reached him, to return to his house long before the usual hour, when he found his friend regaling himself in the light of his lady's smile. He left the room abruptly—the rumour recurred to his mind, and as his friend shortly afterward joined him in his retreat, it may be presumed he felt not very benevolently inclined towards him.

Two men so situated, the one conscious of wrong, the other feeling he had been wronged, were not calculated to preserve for any length of time even a semblance of courtesy. A quarrel shortly after ensued, a hostile meeting resulted, and the Frenchman fell, it was supposed, mortally wounded. The Englishman hastened on board his vessel and stood out to sea. At the end of two days he landed in the dead of night, and stole to his residence. He found that the wounded

man had been borne thither, and that he had been received and cared for by the mistress of the house. Concealing himself for a time, he saw, as he believed, the lady of his love glide from her apartment, and enter the sick-chamber. He met her on her return and upbraided her for her perfidy. She attempted an indignant vindication; when, in a transport of fury, he thrust her from him, and repairing to his vessel, sailed ere dawn from the island, never to return.

The deserted lady's position was not an enviable one, and her conduct seemed to prove that she was guiltless of the charge imputed to her; for, on the Frenchman's partial recovery, he was removed from her residence, and even the common semblance of acquaintance was withdrawn from him. Since this, she had imposed upon herself a gloomy, taciturn existence, exciting the curiosity and sympathy of those who were acquainted with her history, particularly as it was understood that in a brief period she would become a mother. Moreover, it was said that she was anxiously looking for an opportunity to return to her kindred—gossip asserted, to avoid the persecutions of a man whose passion had caused her so much misery.

Lord D'Argentin resolved to succour the lady placed in so painful a position. He succeeded in obtaining an introduction, and improving his acquaintance through well-timed courtesy, won his way to her confidence, and then she assented to his proposal to remove her to her own country, and from the scene of her brief happiness, and her more lengthened grief. This he effected. She was courteously and honourably escorted to Naples, where she procured the countenance of a female relative with whom she resided for a time, and under whose roof she gave birth to a male child. A few months after this event, Lord D'Argentin touched again at Naples, with the hope of meeting the fair Madalena Barrilli, whose grace and beauty had evidently made an impression on his heart. He found she had left Naples, alarmed at the resolve of her relations to compel her to expiate her fault in a convent, and conceal from the world the insult she had brought upon her house. He persisted in a search for her with an ardour which evinced that their once singular position, her gratitude, that heart-emotion which beams so ardently from an impulsive child of the south, or her almost matchless beauty, had exercised a

marked influence over his imagination or his passions. His early conduct had not sprung from a selfish motive, but it had generated one. He sought after her with avidity, but he was constrained to meet with disappointment. His search was reluctantly abandoned, and he repaired to Paris to winter. In the society of some acquaintances, a few days after his arrival, he was asked if he was going to attend the Italian opera that evening to hear the divine Madalena, whose artistic skill and beauty had overwhelmed the Parisian world with admiration and astonishment. With singular anxiety he inquired into the history of so fascinating a being, and learnt that for nearly six months she had been the admired of the fashionable world, and that her influence was irresistible. Her character was without taint—she eschewed the society of the doubtful of the profession to which she was attached; in fact, grief shrouded her beautiful face, arguing that some secret was connected with her appearance before the public which she kept within her own breast.

Lord D'Argentin repaired that evening to the opera, and did not sit expectant long. The curtain rose,—his eyes did not deceive him. Surrounded

by bouquets which had fallen on her entrance in showers at her feet, stood Madalena Barrilli, for whom he had undertaken a long and earnest search. Ere the deafening cheer had passed away, their eyes met ; she evinced sudden and acute emotion.

The scene closed, and shortly a message came that the peerless actress desired his company. He flew to her presence ; she received him with undisguised pleasure. Her carriage being in attendance, he accompanied her to her home. Love burnt fiercely in the gay man's heart ; she was, however, no longer the dreamy voluptuous woman, ready to sacrifice everything at the shrine of passion ; she had tasted the gall of indiscretion, and had grown prudent, and, ere many months had elapsed, she became a sharer in his title, with a legitimate claim to his care and wealth. He did not care to turn his steps to England ; his visits there were of rare occurrence ; the greater part of his life had been spent abroad ; his peregrinations had been extended to a wide field ; he preferred the sun to the cold, a burning atmosphere to the chill east wind of our clime. The East was the centre of attraction ; he would take his wife with him to Syria.

At Aleppo he had spent some months, and now

decided on paying that city another visit. He would not take his wife to England; his pride opposed the step; he felt he could not consistently introduce her to his family; he knew they would not overstep the barrier which "morality" had raised between them and her—he kept the connexion concealed, and journeyed to the land of his adoption. Prior, however, to this step, it was agreed that the child—the source and consequence of former imprudence, and attendant misery—should accompany them, and Lord D'Argentin adopted him. For several years they lived in Syria, and though there was no positive diminution of attachment or fidelity, the gay nobleman, now somewhat affected with ill health, became restless under the connexion.

Her son, now grown into a promising and attractive lad, was a source of deep interest certainly with her, of a brooding, almost fierce character; whilst he who had taught the child to call him father, lavished the affections of a really kind heart upon him. Young Louis, for this name was given to the boy, was honoured with the surname of Wilton, the family name of Lord D'Argentin, and none but those most interested knew but that he pos-

sessed a legitimate claim to it. Lord D'Argentin made this child the heir to his personal property, and suddenly pronounced his resolve to repair to England to add a legal authority to his wishes. He left his wife and her son at Aleppo. It chanced that he took his passage to England in an infected ship, and his servant died ; he himself was sorely smitten, even to the death, though he lingered long. He communicated with Lady Adelaide Neville, his sister, and she hurried his removal to her country-house. It was evident that Lord D'Argentin had but a short time to live. He addressed his wife, but under a feigned name, wishing, it may be presumed, to conceal their real connexion until her arrival. He lingered on for two months, when paralysis ensued, and he was then speechless.

The wife of the dying man at last arrived, and her son. Her legitimate claim was questioned, nay, had she not almost forced a passage to her husband's room, it is doubtful if she would ever have gained admittance there, for the Lady Adelaide Neville was a rigid upholder of the laws and decencies of society. She could readily believe the handsome, imperious, foreigner to be her brother's mistress, but as his wife she would never acknowledge

her. The stricken man could not clear up this point, the shadows of the grave were over him; in his effort to rouse himself, no doubt to do a tardy act of justice, he sank back upon his couch—his eye saw not the light of another day.

Sir Eardley Napier was a near neighbour: he was called to the side of the Lady Adelaide; there was a grave subject to discuss—in what light was the claim of these strangers to be viewed? Sir Eardley Napier gave his opinion as a man of the world would, and undertook to investigate the business. He had an interview with the Italian lady, and he was much prejudiced against her, on account, no doubt, of her proud and arrogant bearing, for she was now maddened at the bitter insult she conceived had been passed upon her. Finding that she believed that her cause stood on a basis beyond questioning, he inquired if she could produce certificates of a marriage-contract. The reply was, that they had remained in her husband's possession, and she demanded that his *escritoire* should be examined. Her wishes were complied with; no document or paper that could establish her claim could be discovered. Foiled on these grounds, the indignation of the Italian lady was implacable.

She saw how frail her position was, and how little likely she was to attain her just and inalienable rights. She had, too, brought herself to believe *her* child had been defrauded of his due.

The case was now handed over to the family lawyer. He had not been idle; he visited Paris, and, in his first interview with the lady, when she asserted that her marriage had taken place in a distant province in France, in conformity with the rites of the Roman-catholic Church (of which faith both were), nine years prior to the present time, he calmly asked her, glancing at the boy, whose appearance warranted the opinion that he was something more than the age, "If she was prepared to prove that that child was the fruit of lawful wedlock?"

She was confounded; she saw her true history was known. This the lawyer perceived; he was fair in his advice, which was to seek the assistance of one of his own profession to aid and direct her course in so difficult a position of affairs. His advice was followed, and a compromise was proposed: the Italian lady hesitated long. Sir Eardley Napier was again called on to act, and he now bore a proposal to the stranger, to the effect, that if she would

give up her boy to the Lady Adelaide's charge, and retire to her own country, an annuity should be secured her, and her child's advancement in life be the Lady Adelaide's especial care. At first, the offer was received in moody silence, then, as before, bitter invective followed, but finally, she consented to meet the Lady Adelaide Neville, to hear from her own lips what her real intentions were. They met in the library of the Lady Adelaide's residence—it can be conceived with emotions of acute and conflicting character. The former overtures were now recapitulated by the family lawyer. The Italian lady spoke of them with a high and disdainful pride, when presently, as her eye fixed on a portrait on the wall, the dark hue of her cheek faded, became, indeed, of a death-like pallor, and rising from her seat with distorted brow she approached the picture; for a time she gazed passionately, then her countenance grew strangely stern, and a light of vindictive feeling stole over her severe yet still beautiful face:

"That is," she said, with a hoarse whisper, pointing to the portrait—

"My husband," answered Lady Adelaide Neville, wonderingly.

A spasm convulsed the questioner's frame.

"He lives?" she continued, after a short and brooding pause.

"Yes. Why do you question me thus?"

The lady turned upon the speaker, and a dark and ominous smile flitted over the quivering lip; then with a sudden effort she seemed to recall her self-possession, and answered:

"One, much resembling the face that canvass purposes to portray, won a dear sister's love, and then abandoned her—a commonplace result, love and wrong." She said no more as she resumed her seat. Former overtures were repeated, a dark red spot burnt in the Italian lady's cheek, when she saw she was expected to reply: "One hour for reflection—leave me here alone—by the time specified I will be ready to answer you."

Her request was complied with, and when the period had elapsed, the Lady Adelaide with her lawyer re-entered the library. But slight evidence of emotion was visible in the Italian lady's face as she turned to meet them.

"I comply with your terms," she said haughtily. "I consign my son to your charge, and then I will

leave a land wherein I have met with scant courtesy and justice."

Three months from that period, and she was to be separated from her child. She left that house, but not with feelings of peace or charity. Yea! an evil spirit prompted vengeance; *she had made a terrible discovery*; the fires of an impulsive, passionate nature, caused her to brood over it with a vindictive, dangerous thought. Three months, and her boy would be taken from her: the time was not spent in cementing the bonds of affection, the labour, one would opine, of a fond mother, though an erring woman. No, she seemed quite case-hardened to emotion: wrong done them, injustice borne, hate to be cultivated, was the boy's lesson. He was told that he had sustained an irreparable injury, that he had been robbed of his patrimony and his name, that when he could better understand her he should know more, but until then, he was to guard against cultivating a single feeling of regard for those with whom he was to reside.

The boy received these schoolings with singular intelligence; he was proud and suspicious, he inherited her passion and her impulse. The separation

took place ; Louis Wilton was settled in his English home—he was now about twelve years of age. The Colonel on his return interested himself in the boy's education ; he had been already singularly instructed ; a fine musical genius had been rarely cultivated ; still something was to be done, and, in compliance with his mother's secret instructions, the youth solicited that he might be sent to a Jesuit college at St Omer. The request, though singular, was complied with. The lad was diligent, and, in his casual visits to Mowbray, left an agreeable impression, an increasing interest in Colonel Neville's breast towards him. The mother had not been idle ; directly she exercised a fatal influence, and as time drew on, and his education seemingly complete when he reached his eighteenth year, the dark evil suspicions, which had been early implanted in the boy's mind, were placed before him in the most vindictive colours. By degrees, and by that art which foul purposes so readily engender, she enforced upon his mind that the Nevilles had been his and her bitter foes. Their charity to him was an insult he was never to overlook. She explained her version—and as the youth had been bred to consider his claim on things of which he had

been defrauded—that Lady Adelaide Neville had embezzled the certificates of marriage with her husband, her brother, and had thus established his illegitimacy, and robbed him of his title, name, and wealth. Sir Eardley Napier likewise came in for his share in the transaction.

“Therefore remember,” she said in her last interview with her son prior to his definite departure for Mowbray, “your position; call it to mind every hour in the day. You are but a poor dependant, where you should have been an acknowledged relative. Your name, which is of honourable degree, is now rendered, through them, one of shame and reproach. You have talent, you have that which renders it effective in the world’s eye, courage and perseverance; devote them to redress the wrongs we have sustained.”

These, and such like lessons, were to be the young man’s guide: every sweet of existence was embittered; and, as his pride had thus been tampered with, there were thoughts in that young brain which shrivelled up each generous trait. Kindness he would read compassion, truth ridicule and hypocrisy, until evil assumed the garb of ruler within his breast. Such was the youth taken to the heart

of the owner of Mowbray. Of singularly elegant demeanour, of great ability, and guarded by a sagacity and tact unusual in one of his age, at the age of eighteen, young Wilton returned to Mowbray. In his former visits, he had made good use of his time; having imbibed an intense passion for field-sports, he made rapid advancement in the science which ornaments them under the tuition of the head groom and gamekeepers. The youth was useful; the sporting mania was upon the Colonel, and, instead of pushing the young man out upon the world, with a helping hand to guide him to a career of usefulness, he kept him by him, made him share in his amusements, and thought it only natural that he should be regarded as part and parcel of the household of Mowbray. It was a weak, ill-regulated liberality: kindness so evinced was of the wrong stamp. No patron can be acting wisely, however good his intentions, in cultivating extravagant tastes in a dependant, unless he means to place him in a position, in a worldly way, to command them at his pleasure. Colonel Neville's political and social influence was considerable; the world, with its divers sources of honourable occupation, is always open to the aspiring and intelli-

gent, with promise of high reward; therefore young Louis should have been put forth from Mowbray: duty demanded it; and had the common law of right been observed, the dangerous purposes of which his mind was replete would have met with a healthy foil.

Some few years passed: Colonel Neville's time was divided between Newmarket and Mowbray, and an occasional visit to town. Young Wilton had grown into a man, with a nerve and intellect well able to cope with even more than the commonplace realities of life. None knew, Colonel Neville only surmised, how the young man managed to indulge his somewhat extravagant tastes; but even he could not fathom the calculating system of one who did not eschew companionship, but who had cast off the garb of dependency. Still it was evident that Colonel Neville's former interest in Wilton had met with some check; his racing establishment remained no longer under the sole control of his former trusted agent; in fact, at an early opportunity, he abandoned the turf; but, until some advanced period, he was not aware that many of his most valuable horses had fallen into Wilton's hands. However, no decided breach took

place between Colonel Neville and his former *protégé*. Colonel Neville was now an idle man; his occupation gone, he became restless and dissatisfied with himself. At this period there chanced to be a dissolution of Parliament: he was solicited to stand for the county wherein his property was situated. He did so, and became the successful candidate, much to the Lady Adelaide's satisfaction and delight, for she expected much increase of social consequence from the high position she believed her husband's powerful intellect would exalt him to in the political world. So far she calculated rightly: fame descended on her husband's labours, and he became in course of time a man of importance.

The "future" took little part in the meditations of husband and wife; the "present" was their all in all, still they could not divorce care from its habitation. Indeed it is long before we learn to what we should cling in life—to what we should dedicate thought, time, and ambition—whom we should trust—when we should spare—when spend our emotions, or even a portion of common prudence. Over the heart's peace of all looms a peril; for though we possess a sense within

of moral responsibility, and have love for things that are pure and good, still temptation *will* steal upon us, and at a time when we least look for its approach. Caution is absent—curiosity has taken its place. A lure comes, bright, yet scarce distinct; its smile becomes more palpable; its steps quicker and quicker; and then it darts in through an accidental opening into the sympathies, and the peril is not far off, particularly if we have nursed that common malady, a craving for excitement.

Colonel Neville was now in the toils of ambition; but he experienced less mental satisfaction than worldly repute. Parties jarred—friends of a political standing changed their opinions through the calculations of personal interests, until the independent member came to view his occupation with distrust. Not so the Lady Adelaide: she was in the bloom of enjoyment, and the ambition which had from the first swayed her tastes and influenced her actions was now confirmed. She felt uneasy as she saw her husband weary of his place in the House. She had recourse to the byplay of the female politician; the minister was most gracious, he soothed the self-love and pride of the independent member, and, when an oppor-

tunity offered of bestowing a marked trust, he "solicited the gallant Colonel to undertake a mission of importance to the French Government." Colonel Neville acceded to the request, and removed with his family to Paris.

And now we will turn from following his public career, and take a hasty view of affairs as they had progressed in his family. The refined and chaste existence of the true mother was tarnished by the vain dream of social consequence and pride. Her elder son was her pet; on him she lavished an imprudent, ill-regulated affection. In all that ministered to his whims and fancies, young Neville was indulged, consequently a taste for pleasure and wild gaiety laid a very strong grasp upon his passions. As long as her son did nothing vulgar, the mother was content; she excused his sudden bursts of passion as a child, and his recklessness as a youth.

Thus matters were when the boy entered on his eleventh year. He was in truth a very handsome lad, with an open and noble brow, a clear blue eye, and comely features. Sadly was the youth neglected, and injured as much by flattery as by disregard of education. It must not be supposed that Louis Wilton had broken off his

connexion with his former friends, or that the doors of Mowbray were closed on him ; Colonel Neville's position was valuable to this farseeing, clever individual, and he so far claimed the Colonel's good offices as to obtain a commission in a crack corps about the time the racing establishment was broken up ; and now, quite independent of the world, Lieutenant Wilton made no unimportant figure in fashionable society, and Lady Adelaide contributed to the extent of her ability her interest to advance his standing therein. This kindness Wilton seemingly repaid through care of young Neville. He was the boy's preceptor in manly sports, and he exercised his utmost talent to make the youth as accomplished a jockey as himself. Over the boy he obtained a vast ascendancy. The lad's career, however, was suddenly interrupted by a very untoward event ; a juvenile freak, likely to have brought the family to trouble, but not worth recounting, was the cause of his being sentenced to cross the threshold, a year before it was intended, of the famed college of Eton. There, the boy soon became a favourite, for there was no great check on his wild spirits, so that they did not break loose in school hours ; in fact, they rather increased than

otherwise through the sympathy they obtained. Latin and Greek is the master's licensed duty. To do more than influence, as far as morals are concerned, by silent good example, would be a sad encroachment on the Etonian's prerogative. No doubt Eton is a noble school; many bright ornaments are sent from it over the great world to proclaim its worth; but when our eyes fall on the empty vapid bubbles, ycleped "fashionables," who bore society with their conceits about its *aristocratic pretensions*, it is quite a relief to remember that its biography immortalizes their follies, but is quite silent upon their talents. Young Neville was a favourite at Eton, for he was versed in most of the Etonian's accomplishments before he entered the school. At Eton young Neville resumed his childhood acquaintance with Henry Napier; they were about the same age, somewhat similar in disposition, and from local connexion and former intimacy became close friends.

Colonel Neville and his remaining family departed for Paris at this period. The mother had paid a farewell visit to her boy; she was delighted with him, for she thought she perceived a great improvement in his appearance; he was certainly a

handsome lad, with a spice of hauteur and independence in his bearing. This charmed the Lady Adelaide. She had promised him, at parting, that he should join her at Christmas ; and all she had to implore of him was not to acquire plebeian tastes and habits.

Young Neville's curiosity was much excited through his mother's accounts of the gaiety and fashion of Paris ; he longed eagerly to join her ; and when the time came he found his anticipations more than realized. The political position of Colonel Neville ; the fashion, connexion, and *bon ton* of his wife, opened even the doors of the exclusives. The world was at their feet ; so the time to the boy flitted by in much too hurried a manner. Colonel Neville returned with his son to England ; but to the boy's taste now England was everything disgusting ; he had left all he could conceive of delight behind him ; it was odious to sit by the side of the stern father, whilst he might have enjoyed the caresses of his dashing and fashionable mother. However, she had promised him he should join her in his next vacation, as she had resolved to live at least another year in Paris ;—and would he not do so ?—What happiness in the perspective !—Wilton,

too, would be there!—What a dashing fellow he was—and how kind he had been to him!

On his return to Eton, young Neville evinced traits of disposition unusual to so mere a boy: even so young he was bitten with a taste for gambling. At Eton he fancied he would gratify his tastes on a small scale. He soon found others ready to follow him in this dangerous bias. One indulgence followed another; the youth and his co-mates became less cautious; their occupation was discovered, and a flogging was the result. On the following morning it was found that young Neville had quitted Eton; and through Wilton's instrumentality, he put himself under his mother's protection at Paris. For some time, the father was ignorant of his son's misdoings; but when the affair was known to him, his anger was excessive. The stern command followed, that the runaway was to be despatched to him. Lady Adelaide took the boy's part; Wilton was employed as mediator; and the result was, the youth remained under his mother's care. Lady Adelaide now resolved on taking her son's education on herself. A near relative—a dear and charming friend of hers—one Madame D'Aigrigny—was following

up a delightful system of education in the person of her son Alphonse; and she suggested that young Neville should study with him: and so it was arranged. A precious system of mental development commenced. Better would it have been had the Allwise struck that young daring intellect with blight, than that it should have been subject to the jesuitical training it received. Education is man's destiny; the talisman of genius when wisely ordered; if not, the soul's green youth is drugged by a dank weed.

At sixteen, the youth's education was thought to be completed; and, in truth, judging with a superficial eye, he seemed an apt, intelligent, and accomplished boy.

I will pass over two years in the youth's history; only observing, that, in Parisian doings and accomplishments, he had acquired a proficiency hardly to be looked for in one of his age. Captain Wilton was more than satisfied with his pupil: he spent much of his time in Paris, and there made the Lady Adelaide Neville's residence his home. The Parisian world is and was an easily convinced one. Little allusion was made to the close intimacy existing between the aristocratic matron and the

accomplished individual whose courtesy was unwavering. All was viewed through the medium of fashion's indulgent light; and as few could pry into the depths of Wilton's intentions or designs, he was left at will to think his own thoughts, and follow them out in accordance with his own dark schemes.

About the age of eighteen, William Neville was recalled from Paris to London. His father had obtained a commission in the army for him. Lady Adelaide likewise returned to England. At this period young Neville was a handsome youth; a man in stature, set off by a manner and bearing that well fitted him for general society. To say the truth, Colonel Neville even was proud of his son; his wit, humour, and accomplishments dispelled the father's prejudice on account of early errors; and he confessed to his wife that the boy had made great progress during his sojourn in Paris. Lady Adelaide was reserved and dignified; she held but brief conferences with her husband. At this period Colonel Neville knew nothing of domestic life; he saw his wife but seldom; and when he met the son in public, the father's pride was gratified. Of course, young Neville was a great deal in

the gay world; he was even thus early liberally supplied with money; and many became very intimate with him on a *very* slight acquaintance. He was now a budding fashionable of a crack corps—the Pelham of his set, as Wilton named him, with large expectations.

Young Neville now held the helm, and for a time he sailed before the breeze with a flowing sheet. Suddenly he was *taken aback*, for he lacked the knowledge of *raising the wind*; so, to continue my nautical figure, he *missed stays*, and was near upon drifting on the *lee shore* of fashionable opinion. In fact, the youth kept bad reckoning, and like even more experienced navigators, who have not kept a good look out, he mistook *Scilly* for the *Isle of Man*: so sad a blunder, that but for Wilton's safe piloting he could never have ventured on the *main* again. Indirectly, Colonel Neville learnt the nature of this delicate affair, and tendered Wilton grateful thanks for his services. Colonel Neville's conduct was certainly open to censure. Years prior to this time he had cause to mistrust Wilton: facts he knew should have strengthened this mistrust; instead of which he actually effected an exchange for his son to Captain Wilton's regiment, placing

him under his surveillance. It certainly does seem strange that Colonel Neville should have ceased to remember what had been in regard to Wilton; but the fact was, Wilton's influence over the mind or sympathies of his acute and able patron was such as to cause the latter often to yield when he meant to resist or oppose. The colonel's favour resulted more from a *sensation* than from reason. Wilton was in a thriving condition now; he had worked slowly but surely; he had won large sums of money on the turf; he was successful at all games where success required coolness and calculation, whilst the daring intellect which he possessed enabled him to turn these ways and means to the best possible account. He flew at high game; he sought to grasp a noble prize indeed—no other than the primitive claim to the hand of the fair and blooming Ellen, who had now entered her fifteenth year. Calculating with his natural shrewdness, he saw it was necessary to get young Neville under his dominion, which he did without much trouble.

About this time the pecuniary affairs of the colonel required adjustment; the drains upon his resources had been too great; his attention was imperatively required to matters he had allowed to go

too long neglected ; his lawyer intimated to him that it was with difficulty that he could raise further money upon the already mortgaged estates of Mowbray. These pecuniary difficulties brought about a more minute investigation. The mortgagee had acted through his agent, a shrewd lawyer at S——, the town in the immediate vicinity of Mowbray. Colonel Neville's man of business was compelled to treat at last with the principal in the affair, in order to be satisfied of his feelings in regard to his client.

The discovery made fell like a thunderbolt on Colonel Neville. Wilton it was who could dictate terms to him. Wilton was the principal in the business, and he it was who had advanced some thousands to support the extravagance of the Neville family. Colonel Neville's feelings may be easily understood,—the poor dependant,—the now calculating and subtle man, whose conduct for some time had made him feel most uneasy, held a lien of consequence on his ancestral property. And for what motive? Why so deep a secrecy observed? For all this, some deep and hidden reason there must be ;—and Colonel Neville was not the man to remain in doubt on a matter of such moment. But

Wilton was beforehand with him ; he had received sure intelligence of the Colonel's feelings, and now he boldly dared an interview. The two met. After some commonplace remarks, Wilton, unheeding the Colonel's formal reception of him, commenced without a particle of restraint in tone and manner, by saying, " I have long wished to have some chat with you, sir, relative to a subject in which my feelings are concerned. I have lived too long under your roof, not to be fully sensible to the opening graces and loveliness of your daughter. Her tender years have held me silent until now, but feeling that others might aspire to the honour I solicit, I have, although perhaps somewhat prematurely, decided it would be well to make known the nature of my ambition to you."

Colonel Neville heard this speech through, and no muscle of his countenance changed. When it was concluded, he said, with stern hauteur, for pride was more potent now than the singular influence Wilton's presence generally exercised over his feelings :—

" A becoming ambition, certainly, Captain Wilton, and your boldness of speech, advancing a proposal almost in the form of a command, proves that

you do not expect much opposition to its aim. But permit me to answer you, that my daughter, a girl now fifteen years of age, will, I hope, in proper season form a connexion which will meet with her father's sanction. Enough of this, let this subject be a sealed chapter between us. I presume recent facts, supplied through my agent, and I find no secret to either of us, have been so secretly manoeuvred to exhibit your *disinterestedness*."

Wilton's eye flashed from the light of rising passion, but he answered coolly:—

"I may wish to prove I did not come with empty hands to solicit so great a privilege; but for your own purposes you would not have learnt the name of him who held a mortgage of some moment on the broad lands of Mowbray, and now, it seems, my delicacy and forbearance must be rated falsely. However, at all events, you have proof I can support the position of a gentleman in society. My name is said to be tarnished; true," and here his brow flushed deeply, "but the stain rests not on those whose memory I revere. Colonel Neville, grant my prayer, restore me to myself and to society, through the means proposed, and you will consummate a hope which I have treasured for years."

“I can believe you have well matured your plans,” remarked Colonel Neville, “and you have nobly, perseveringly laboured. But enough of this; dismiss such visionary fancies from your mind, they are not apposite to the acts of so scientific and skilled a gentleman. Yes, sir, frown as you like, now you shall have the truth. Years ago, when I loved you as my own boy, you betrayed, nay, cheated me. You remember the affair attracted some attention at the time. I lost sight of you for a period. You won for yourself—the world is easily gulled by men of your craft—a good position in society, and I, blaming myself for throwing former temptations in your way, and not deadened to former regard, lent you my countenance, and restored you to my esteem. You flourished, for you had perfected yourself in the art of blinding your fellow-man in his estimate of your real character. Moving in a different sphere to what I had when I knew you better, I judged you with the eye of others, and as you seemed: had I frequented the haunts of former days, I conclude my opinion about you would have been different. I say I trusted you—I placed my son near you, blindly believing you would befriend his inexperience.

You *feel* I have been bitterly deceived. Since I obtained the information to which I allude, I have taken the trouble to look into your conduct; I have learnt things which plainly tell me that I plucked my son from swindlers, to throw him into the harpy clutches of one more avaricious, and more ungrateful, than I could before have supposed existed on God's earth. You profess to seek my daughter's hand. Heaven shield her young heart from the foul contamination. If you have trifled with her young affections, a day of heavy retribution is not far off. But I acquit you of sentiment in any form: your ambition is her dower, and I can well believe your eye has been directed towards it for years. But enough of this: henceforth know there is a barrier between us, and learn that from respect to my wife's family, to whom you are surreptitiously connected, I forbear to give your conduct general publicity."

Wilton made a step forward as Colonel Neville ceased speaking, and approaching within arm's length of his companion, stood confronting him with a deep and bitter scowl. Then the natural temper of the man burst forth. With a countenance quite livid with rage, and with a wild, electric passion in the eye, he cried:—

"And you dare taunt me in reference to my birth! Know you not that it is to her who owes allegiance to you that I owe this false curse which is upon me; and therefore here I swear, that on you I will wreak my vengeance. You allude to your daughter's dower; I own my motive; that which was once my father's descends through your wife to her; 't is natural, as there is nothing for me, who should in justice have owned all. I should wish to possess the fragment left of my sire's possessions, that a family may be fostered in the house of his ancestors. I have been candid—I own this to be my spring of action, the one incentive of a hard labour. I never recognised obligation, and therefore I scorn your charge of ingratitude. We part, but not for long. I will be ever about you, and steadfast to my purpose; ay, though the craft of all the world be arrayed against me, I will execute the designs which I have now explained." And with bitter meaning in his glance, he turned away and stalked from the apartment.

After this open declaration of hostilities, the Colonel sought his son's apartment, with a resolve to wean him, if possible, from his intimacy with Wilton. The father had determined on using the

mildest measures : he knew severity would fail ; he felt, moreover, he must make the breaking off of this connexion a matter of favour to himself, or that his son must take his argument to this effect, with faith in his judgment, as he could not reveal to him the extent of Wilton's criminality. Such were his views as his hand rested on the lock of his son's room, and when he gently opened the door ; but his kindness of intention momentarily left him, as he beheld Wilton seated there, so deeply engaged in the chances of *écarté* with him he sought, that his presence was unperceived, whilst the expression of the countenance, and occasional bursts of anger which came from the lips of the younger man, plainly evinced that he was a heavy loser.

Colonel Neville's eye rested gloomily on the scene. The first idea was to step forward, and, with a father's authority, dismiss Wilton from his son's presence ; but, on reflection, he felt assured his son's wayward temper would be roused to defiance, and then the hope on which he so dwelt would be frustrated. He slowly retired, therefore, from the room, and, on his way home, resolved to write and request an interview with his son in the morning. This he did, and remained in waiting some time

after the hour appointed, but no notice was taken of his mandate.

At midnight William Neville returned to his apartments, excited by wine,—indeed his faculties seemed scarcely under his control. He stood with half-intoxicated stare in the centre of the room, holding a small lamp in his hand, muttering oaths on his bad luck, and then, with the eccentricity of poor cozened reason, humming opera airs. It was some moments before he seemed to understand that he was not alone in that apartment. He was not : one step did his visiter take towards him, and then confronted him with folded arms. The young man's eye at last rested on his father ; there was something in his glance and bearing the son had never seen before—it sobered him at once. The father saw the eye of his wilful boy quail before him, and for a time he scanned the downcast countenance with feelings of grief rather than of anger. At length he said :—

“William, I shall not reproach you for treating my summons with neglect; enough, we are now together. Let us sit, and, if possible, be calm. I have much to say to you.”

The son obeyed his father's wish, and the latter

then commenced an explanation of affairs touching Wilton's conduct.

"After all, I cannot see anything in his behaviour to justify the extreme course you request me to pursue," said the young man; "he has always acted towards me with much disinterested kindness."

"You speak of his disinterested kindness, William; little do you know of man's character, if you suppose that such as he possess one feeling of regard for a breathing soul. Disinterested, indeed! ay, boy, such disinterestedness as the wolf feels, when he takes his midnight prowling around a sheepfold. Must I again assure you that he has made himself the man of worldly note by his treachery and cunning? And so beware of him, William; you are warned; his purpose is to bind your heart and soul to a false and cruel interest, which will, if carried out, tarnish your father's honour, and bring infamy and disgrace upon the once honoured name of Neville."

"Father, you do him injustice," was the son's rejoinder: "men like him, who have a difficult course to steer to obtain a good position in society, and who have been rudely pushed about in main-

taining a purpose which is the will of a fair ambition, know by experience it is not what a man *is*, but what he *dares*, that enables him to advance his ends. As for Wilton, he has always behaved fairly towards me."

"How?" cried Colonel Neville, with rising anger. "By taxing your purse, I presume, some hundred per cent. for money lent to you, which has before been won of you."

"Did you so estimate the conduct of those to whom you lost your money on the turf, sir? I have heard you were not over fortunate in your ventures," said the son,—a covert sneer rising on the lip.

"Boy," replied the father, with calm dignity, "betray not your principles too plainly; I would sooner regard you with a feeling of sorrow, than one of contempt. I plead to you; I adduce reason to aid my endeavours to save you. William, mark me; you are on the brink of a precipice; one onward step in the same path, and no influence of mine will be able to save you. Remember this, and heed me as I tell you, that evil example to most is dangerous, but a searching poison to the mind already far advanced in the field of moral

wrong. You must give up this acquaintance, or lose my esteem: and as regards your future income, you will find it curtailed; circumstances compel me to economize. You have heretofore drawn heavily upon me; this must cease, and for a second reason too, for I now suspect the purpose to which those heavy sums have been applied, and I should be worse than a fool to countenance your infatuation."

"You use strong language, father," answered the son, now somewhat alarmed. "Surely the simple act of playing a few games of *écarté* does not call for so severe a censure; and as to my expenses, had you before complained, I should have regulated my expenditure in accordance to your wishes, but now I shall find it a difficult affair."

"You have not lived long enough in the world," he said, "to falsify by lip-utterance the bent of your suspicions. I said nothing of *écarté*, nor did I particularize the nature of your occupation. But since you specify your pastime, I would ask you whether the amusement is not purchased at the expense of bills and bonds, which will involve your patrimony in mortgage and encumbrance when it finds you its possessor."

Colonel Neville paused for a few moments; per-

haps he thought it useless to protract the conference. As he rose to leave, he said shortly, "You are warned that you are toying with the most dangerous reptile in society—an utterly unfeeling and ungrateful man—with him you have already commenced the gambler's career. If you allow fancy to grow up into a passion, you will poison at an early age the spring of a bright existence."

There was truth and clearness enough in Colonel Neville's remarks, and his argument was sound; yet there was a want of real parental feeling about it. When a parent's early indiscretions and errors have become to him the monitors of wisdom, he should not allow the *good* that has been extracted from error to harden the judgment, or to assume too much upon his recently purchased independence and prudence. The parent's past and the child's future should be the parent's guide; the one to be the physician of social diseases, and in the hope for the other a prescience learnt from the past. Parents should forbear, with a wise and prudent thought, when they see errors in their children, which, in their natural anxiety for their welfare, cause them pain and uneasiness. They should remember the influence of temptation over them-

selves ; and that as *they found experience* was the corrector of rash impulses, so may it be with those whose young hearts have yet to acquire—through some pleasure, some pain, and much mortification—this great truth. Parents should estimate their children's frailties through a medium which enables them to preserve their love and interest without taint ; for when parental authority becomes tyrannical, its power is ungenial and dreaded, instead of being, as it should be, a confidence which cheers, comforts, counsels, and directs.

In Colonel Neville's case, he should have remembered that this taste for gambling shown by his son was one of such an alarming character that the whole energies of the father should have been exerted to have drawn him off so dangerous a bias. His duty would have been better fulfilled had he cleared his son of his engagements ; and then, by opening a new field for amusement, guardedly and with prudent foresight, have proved to reason rather than impulse, how baneful was the danger that environed him. Some will say, "It would have been useless ; there was a moral wrong ; the father did not watch for nor correct the beginning of error." True ; still, as Colonel Neville

knew the character of Wilton, had had fair notice of his evil purpose; and was aware of his influence in a quarter where the subtle man could strike him so bitterly, he should have done more, far, far more, than merely remonstrate with his son, and at a later period, though prior to my tale, his conduct was marked by excessive severity.

At this period the father curtailed his son's allowance. This act he thought would prove a salutary check. He warned him, by letter only, of the consequences of further extravagance, and he presumed, that a command that he was to break off his connexion with Wilton was sufficient. How little does a worldly minded parent know of the heart and disposition of his child! He generally judges, not through the evil passions which once guided him, but through those sobered traits gleaned from the field of a harsh experience. He remembers not that the shiftings in the tastes and habits of society, or dissimilar education, may have so influenced, that even the natural stream has been quite turned from its course. The form and similarity of the external likeness remain no more. A son will sometimes inherit moral promise; but the rule has exceptions from a good and wise parent, and

the wise parent will labour to render the ray of virtue thus bequeathed a principle or light to guide his boy. But even here external circumstances, beyond the father's ken, may, as his child is influenced by them, render the heart, disposition, and principles less strikingly hereditary than he, from the deceit of affection, can understand.

Matters seemed settled in Colonel Neville's judgment, when, on the following week, his lawyer had placed his affairs in a position to enable him to discharge the lien upon his property; and as his pride prompted him to keep before the world as much as possible at this time, he accepted the trust of a second political mission to the French government.

A month had scarcely passed before the Lady Adelaide was compelled, on account of her health, to implore her husband's return. Ill-regulated feelings, ever inclining to excess, aggravated her malady; religious principles were not with her, to shed their healing influence over her bruised spirit. She was alone, and a mind, fettered by many cold worldly bonds, thus circumstanced, feels bitterly the poverty of misspent time. Her health had long been failing her, and now with melancholy and the weary heart came the burning pulse,

the fevered brow, as the forerunner of the approach of the tyrant whose mandate none can evade. The family physician made known his conviction that her case was beyond the reach of earthly skill. Her disease was decline ; not so much consumption, as a slow wasting away of the system ; and for a time her intellect shared in the bodily wreck.

Sir Eardley Napier and his wife were by her ; they proved themselves earnest friends. The former put himself in communication with Colonel Neville, and received his request to act for him during the short period of his detention from England. Sir Eardley fulfilled his trust. During its performance he had cause to visit Colonel Neville's bankers, when a *certain startling affair* came before him, the purport of which it would have been most impolitic to have concealed from his friend. Colonel Neville at length reached Mowbray. Sir Eardley was some time closeted with him the morning following his friend's return. The latter came forth a sadly altered man indeed ; there was a sternness in the eye, a rigidity of the lip, a crimson flush upon the brow, significant of the strong mind striving to control some vast mental disquiet. A messenger was despatched for William Neville. An hour after his

arrival, as he was returning with uncertain step from his father's room, his sister, Ellen, sprang forward to greet him. He repulsed her, saying: "I am an outcast, Ellen, forget me; the doors of Mowbray are closed on me for ever:" and so he passed the terror-stricken girl.

Recovering the shock her blithe young spirit had received, she moved towards her father's door, no doubt hoping to plead successfully for her brother. She entered softly; the object which met her sight was enough to paralyze the faculties of so young a creature. Her father stood immediately facing her, with a wild, brooding resolution in his countenance, in the act of raising a pistol to his head. With a cry of horror, the young girl flung herself upon his breast, and, winding herself about him, said frantically: "My father, what would you do?" then with strength given her through her despair, she wrenched the weapon from his grasp. For a minute the father stood in the same dark frame of mind, then as a spasm convulsed his frame, he sank without sense or motion to the floor. Assistance came, but it was long before the suffering man revived—it had been an alarming fit. As his eyes opened, and reason cleared sufficiently for him to remember

what had been, he drew the young girl to him, and, kissing her pale cheek, said : " God preserve thee, my better angel ; never shalt thou be sacrificed : " it was all he could say, for his child was weeping on his bosom. Colonel Neville was removed to his room. To the astonishment of every one, Lady Adelaide left her apartment and watched over him with deep and intense solicitude : nothing, in the shape of attention, could exceed the care and earnestness of the feeble wife, and her devotion was rewarded through her husband's partial recovery.

In their affliction, husband and wife were more closely united than they had ever been before. They felt they were soon to part ; and that invisible hand, which watches over the pure spirit of virtue, drew them together, and spoke to them of things they had thought but little of, from the time they stood at the holy altar and breathed the mutual pledge of love and duty. But the dark shadow stole on nevertheless, and a few days before the Lady Adelaide's death, she earnestly requested to see her son. It was a bitter meeting : the mother knew her heart now, and its anguish was great. At the death-bed, nature overcame the evils of edu-

cation, and the son was prostrate. Her desire was to effect a reconciliation between father and son, but she had overtaxed her strength. She commenced a grave argument with her boy. In two short days the mortal had put on immortality—the presence of death was in the house of Mowbray.

Let us pass over the time of sorrow, and refer to the line of conduct Colonel Neville now pursued. He had had one more interview with his son. He offered pardon if he would comply with the terms proposed ; they were, it seemed, not hard,—he was simply called upon to break off utterly his connexion with Wilton. Strange it was the son chose banishment to compliance with this demand. He said, “He had not *the power* to accede to his father’s wishes ; he would be obedient in aught beside.” Angry taunts ensued, and the fiery mandate followed. “As in your wilfulness,” said the incensed father, “you scorn parental authority, and have already branded an honourable name with infamy, go you forth ; add crime to crime ; progress in villainy ; become, as you soon will, a gibe in the mouths of honest men ; but look not for protection or countenance from me : henceforth your name shall be

blotted out from home records, and from home sympathies ;" and, in the world's eye, the father kept his word.

But a great change had come over the feelings of the worldly minded man. He retired from his public career, abandoned its hopes or vanities, and made Mowbray his home.

Such was the position of affairs at this period at Mowbray.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW days only intervened between the interview Colonel Neville held with Napier in the avenue to Vallis House, before the former, with his daughter Ellen, resolved on visiting their neighbours.

As they reached Vallis House close upon the dinner-hour, they were prevailed on to remain. Little to interest passed during this meal, independent of some remarks from Colonel Neville relative to a visit he had received from a friend of Dr Powell's (the physician of the respective houses) of the name of Langton. No one seemed interested in this circumstance but Napier; he, however, had many questions to ask, and they were answered freely and frankly. Napier was interested and excited. This gentleman's visit to him at Oxford returned vividly to his memory.

Mary Napier looked surprised at her brother's

anxiety and concern in reference to this stranger,—a person of whom she had never heard before ; and, turning to Ellen Neville, she said—

“ If you have seen this individual, who seems to have fascinated Charles and your good father, do you join in the common opinion ? ”

“ Almost,” answered Ellen Neville, “ though not inclined to be led captive by first impressions. He is, I assure you, a very agreeable person, with the charm of appearing quite unconscious that he is so ; possessing a kind of pleasing information obtained from experience in the busy world, as well as from reading, which renders his conversation most interesting and instructive ; ” and, further, she said to Mary Napier, in a low voice,—

“ I remember he spoke of you : he said your brother had asked about your health when he met him at Oxford ; and a smile of unfeigned pleasure lit a somewhat melancholy expression of countenance when Dr Powell assured us you were greatly better.”

“ On my word,” replied Mary Napier, in the same voice, “ I, too, must be interested. Do not urge further argument, dear Ellen ; let my imagination do the rest.....”

When the female portion of the party had retired, Colonel Neville's seeming cheerfulness waned: he had not been at Vallis since Sir Eardley's death, and it was natural his thoughts should be grave ones. His first remark evinced their complexion.

"Little did I think, Charles," he said, "the last time I dined here, there would so soon be a severance of friendly ties. My poor friend is gone, taken from us and from worldly trial. I confess the feeling within my mind is envy of his lot." He paused for a few minutes, and his humbled mien told the history of an erring but repentant heart.

"He was a true friend to me. He rendered me, in his latter days, a service of deep worth;" and now his thoughts took another direction. "I am astonished," he observed, "to note the fortitude with which your mother bears her trials; hers is a truly good and well-regulated mind. I wish we could allay her fears in reference to your brother! It is very strange, Charles, that you can glean no intelligence concerning him."

"Both strange and perplexing, Colonel," answered Napier, "and, to you, I must confess my fears and uneasiness. I have employed most active

agents, but the result of inquiry is more than unsatisfactory; it has become alarming from the ominous lack of intelligence. I have forwarded information of my father's death to correspondents on the Continent, but entirely fail to elicit information about him."

"I do not seek to add to your uneasiness," remarked the Colonel, "but I cannot help saying, that I much fear something calamitous has occurred. Though your brother was somewhat gay and extravagant, still his heart was a warm, impulsive one; and, from what I remember of him, I should say, he would be the last person to evince so marked an indifference to the sorrows and troubles of home, did he know what has taken place: besides he is now the head of your house, and should naturally feel his presence here an imperative duty."

"He knows nothing of what has happened, depend upon it," cried Napier, earnestly, "or he would hasten hither. A warmer heart never throbbed in man's breast than in his. I will seek him myself; my mind is fixed in this resolve. There is a mystery in his silence, which I must

solve ; if I do not make an attempt to clear it up, I shall go mad from apprehension of evil."

A servant, shortly after Napier had so expressed himself, entered with the letter-bag. It contained one letter for himself only. As he scanned its contents, it could be seen, from the sudden change of countenance, that unusually painful intelligence had been received. His whole face flushed crimson for a moment, when an extreme pallor followed, as he sat with his hands clasped and his eyes filled with the stern sense of horror, gazing almost vacantly beyond his friend, as if he was indeed bewildered. He after a time handed the missive to him, but evidently not quite aware of what he was doing ; and Colonel Neville seemed scarcely less affected as he read the following communication :

"S——, May 22, 18—.

"SIR,—I am instructed by my client, Louis Wilton, Esq., to inquire, whether you can favour me with intelligence of your brother, now Sir Henry Napier, or if, through your advices, you can inform me when he, the said Sir Henry Napier, may be expected to return to this country.

"My client requests me to say that this inquiry has been delayed on account of your recent family affliction ; but that in justice to himself, and for the protection of his interests, he considers he should be silent no longer, as the point at issue is the settlement of a loan of importance, for which my client holds Sir Henry Napier's bond. I should likewise inform you, that the said bond, in the event of its not being discharged, comprises a lien on the estates of Vallis, to which Sir Henry Napier has succeeded.

"I have the honour to remain, SIR,

"Your obedient, humble Servant,

"RALPH WHITTAKER."

For some minutes Napier and his companion seemed disinclined to break the ominous silence which followed the perusal of this startling communication.

"He has secured a crafty tool to aid him in his foul work," muttered the elder man ; then, perceiving Napier's uneasiness, he said, with a deep sigh, "This is a terrible disclosure, and burdened with shame and sorrow. It tells you that your brother must have been guilty of vast indiscretion, and it calls on you to prepare for trouble of a new

kind. What!" cried the old man, with something of his former pride, "shall the old house pass into the harpy clutches of this miscreant! 'Fore Heaven, it seems that Providence smiles upon his roguery. How, how must you proceed?" and the speaker's head sank upon his breast, as if indeed his heart was prostrated at the disclosure.

Napier presently said, "Do you know, Colonel, I have an idea in my mind which almost amounts to a conviction, that Mr Langton, the man we were speaking of just now, could render me some assistance, and perhaps information. Whilst we were together at Oxford, I met Wilton. Mr Langton's countenance certainly evinced personal annoyance; he seemed much agitated, and it arose through no friendly impulses, or I am mistaken. If I am right in my surmise, he must have some reason for his repugnance; and though it must be remote from my interests, a tittle of evidence of Wilton's recent occupations and sojourn may help to guide me in my judgment as to when and how this obligation arose."

"You may be right," answered Colonel Neville; "and I own to you Mr Langton interests as well as puzzles me. I will arrange that you shall meet

him, which you had better do at my house. Have a bold heart," said the Colonel very feelingly to his young friend, as he rose to leave the room. "When the affections are interested, resolution of mind is requisite to give stability and substance to the dictates of prudence and common sense."

As the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, they found Ellen Neville seated on a footstool by Mary Napier, looking up into her face with a concerned though winning smile, seemingly urging an acquiescence in some wish of her own.

Colonel Neville gazed with deep affection on his daughter, and he could not suppress a sigh as he crossed the room to greet Mr Wilmott, who had joined the party.

Napier stood a short distance from his sister's chair, with his eye fixed on Ellen, noting, it would seem, the earnest gaze which followed her father. Her jealous love suspected something had gone wrong; and as she perceived she was noticed, her cheek became pale; and, rising from her seat, she said, with self-imposed restraint: "Mr Napier, I have been striving to seduce Mary from her seclusion. Do bring her to Mowbray. I must look for you to overrule resistance, and you can urge the

improvements of her once-favoured rambles as a lure."

"Yes; there are many pleasing objects at Mowbray," answered Napier,—“pleasing to the eye and gratifying to the sight of an old acquaintance. Many a spot do I remember vividly; for many a happy hour as a child did I spend amongst them. Since my return I have made one or two excursions to our old haunts. All seemed most familiar, with the exception of one obscure nook we christened the ‘cloudy dell.’ It is strangely altered now;—a pretty summer-house stands there: the lofty boughs are lopped away, and the bank around is strewn with flowers. It should be called ‘the sunny creek,’ instead of ‘the cloudy dell,’ now.”

The ‘cloudy dell’ seemed unconsciously to escape from Ellen Neville’s lips; and, looking into Napier’s face, a shudder seemed to convulse her frame.

“The designation is more apposite now than before,” she said, with a pained countenance. “You must keep my secret, if I tell you I often meet my brother there;—he never comes to Mowbray now. It was only last week that a singular adventure occurred to me not far from that spot. Has not Mr Wilmott alluded to the matter to you?”

"No;" was the reply. "He has said nothing of any adventure or circumstance which referred to you."

"Strange!" remarked Ellen, "very strange; but I will not speculate on Mr Wilmott's reason for his silence. I presume he thinks he has no liberty to allude to an affair which came so singularly and indirectly to his knowledge; however this may be, I will tell my tale, and you can form your own conclusions. You will understand that, on Thursday last, as Mr Wilmott was leaving Mowbray, I proposed accompanying him to Roland's Cliff on his way. As we ascended the path above 'cloudy dell,' our quiet conversation was interrupted by our unexpectedly encountering a female sitting on a stone at the turn of the hill. I was rather startled at the abrupt encounter, and the feeling was not allayed, as I cast a glance upon the person who rose and stood directly in my road. I knew her not; nor had I ever seen a person in this neighbourhood at all like her. Her habiliments were of no common kind, though soiled and worn; and there was something in her air and mien which impressed me with the idea that she must be a foreigner. But then, how came she there? For what purpose

should she be in this retired spot,—a place alone frequented by the household of one or other of our families? I thought she might be a person in distress, but, from appearance, belonging to a class in society removed from the lowly ~~among us~~. At first she gazed earnestly into my face with a quick, startling glance, then stopped me ; but so gently was the act performed that I was less alarmed than surprised. From an impulse, which I fear was offensive to her, I asked if I could render her assistance ; but, on raising my eyes to her face, I saw it flush, and an expression of pain follow, which proved more than words could the error I had committed. I can never forget the countenance I gazed upon ;—the pure olive of its complexion ; the brilliancy of an eye of a deeper blue than I had ever before seen, and veiled by lashes of black, unusually long and beautiful. But now I felt uneasy after a second glance ; for I feared those lovely orbs were lit by the repelling fire of insanity. The expression passed away, and then there was a wild melancholy about the face, which bespoke a bitter heart-history, and irresistibly invited sympathy. Yet there was pride in the eye as it encountered mine,—a mental consciousness, so I construed it, of being superior to

her outward appearance. She was slight and delicate in form, and young,—seeming, even in this strange, questionable guise, a sweet flower rudely shaken by a storm.”

“Miss Neville,” she said, as she bent an anxious eye upon me, and I fancied I detected a slightly foreign accent in her speech. “You must pardon me for my seeming rudeness ; but I must speak to you : I have long anxiously watched for an opportunity. Will you then grant me a few minutes of your time ; for I have that to say which, if left unsaid, may endanger your future peace and welfare.” I answered, that I could not suppose she had aught to reveal of the importance ascribed ; but if she would visit me in the morning I would see her. “Such cannot be,” was the reply ; “but doubt not my sincerity, though my conduct may appear strange, and my appearance and manner not less so. Ask your companion to move onward, and I will render my words clearer to you.”

Mr Wilmott complied at once with the stranger’s wish, and her eye followed him with, it seemed to me, an expression of much interest ; then turning to me she said :—

“Miss Neville, you must not question me relative

to the manner in which I have acquired my knowledge of you, nor in what way I have obtained information which concerns you; believe, however, that you may rely implicitly on my words. Heed me, then, as I tell you, trials await you, danger threatens you. Your cheek is pale; it gives me pain to cloud the heart of one who would have served me; but my intentions, and the knowledge I possess in relation to yourself, justify my words, and your position requires that they should not be stinted of their force from fear of wounding you. Seek a friend in whom you can impose implicit confidence, and be prepared to combat the machinations of the wicked and designing. Prudence, circumspection, and resolution of no common order, will be required, as I believe. You are warned; and as I bade you beware of a great danger arising from a false influence over one you much love, I would likewise beg you to meet me fearlessly, should I summon you; for I am a woman who have known truth, and a woman's pity, though it be a feeble agent, would succour the distressed. One day I may have it in my power to be more explicit; but should it chance that we are not to meet again, I must tell you the source of your trial is

nearer *home* than you can now conceive." And thus she left me.

Napier and his sister felt uneasy. A strange story had been told them, and why? Ellen, they knew, possessed a calm, clear judgment, and she would not have related an affair that seemed to shadow forth trouble to herself, for the sake of enlisting the sympathies of her acquaintance of the hour. No. Napier felt there was an undivulged reason; he would not venture a remark, but awaited its disclosure. Ellen had paused, for she now felt her sudden confidence was open to misconstruction; but as she gazed into the faces of her companions, all timidity disappeared; and, speaking very earnestly, she added:—

"You may suppose that I have not revealed this matter to you for the sake of exciting your curiosity, or solely to obtain commiseration, though the sympathy of a friend in a time of adversity is a rich boon. I am excited, however, by other feelings. I much need a friend. I cannot apply to my father. I would sooner endure to the extent of suffering than have my fears alleviated at the sacrifice of the little comfort my seeming cheerfulness affords him. Will you two then be my friends?" gazing up into her

companions' countenances with sweet earnest confidence. "I know I have little claim upon you : but I remember too, that as children, dear Mary, our hands were often locked together, as we pledged each in childhood's love. And you," she said, as her eye rested a moment on Napier's face, "were always my protector in our youthful troubles ; and will you now, should circumstances require, render me, through the medium of this our mutual confidante," and her hand was placed in Mary's, "the advice and counsel you deem best."

Hardly had Ellen finished speaking before Napier leant forward, and said, in a voice that caused the hearts of his listeners to thrill, though he spoke scarcely above a whisper :

"Through weal or woe, through trial or danger, I will be a sure friend,—readily advising to the best of my ability, and with heart and hand your friend unchangeable."

Ellen's hand was extended from the impulse of grateful emotion, and though few words passed, the compact was truly understood.

"When did you meet this stranger?" asked Napier.

"On Thursday ; and if you can glean any intel-

ligence of her, I rely on you to inform me," was the reply.

"I will do so," answered Napier. "Strange!" he muttered. "A foreigner, young, and struggling against distress; and yet too proud to receive a favour. Can it be," he said to himself, as he shuddered; "but no! the idea is worse than visionary." Yet he rose from his seat, evidently oppressed by the idea which had obtruded. Then he thought of the earnest pledge he had given, and examined the cause which had drawn it forth.

Colonel Neville here broke in upon the young people's conference, and suggested to his daughter that she should prepare for their departure, as night was drawing on. Lady Napier pleaded strongly that Ellen should remain, as a thunder-storm threatened. A messenger could be despatched to Mowbray for all things essential for her toilet, and remain she must. Colonel Neville yielded to Lady Napier's entreaty.

"I wished to have a few words with you, Charles," remarked Colonel Neville, as he and Napier stood at the hall-door waiting the arrival of the Colonel's horse. "I have decided you must see Dyson (the family lawyer) as soon as possible. We cannot re-

call yesterday, we cannot insure the morrow ; great difficulties often arise from procrastination, so, with your consent, I will request him to meet you at Mowbray the day after to-morrow. I will get Mr Langton over, too, and if you think he can serve you, unbosom freely ; he is a man to be trusted, I feel confident. The fact of his being Dr Powell's guest is at least a guarantee that he can have no feeling inimical to you if he seeks your acquaintance, because you know how enthusiastic Powell is in all that relates to Vallis House." Napier readily assented to the Colonel's wishes, when the latter, resting his hand upon his young friend's shoulder, remarked, " You must relax that brow of care, Napier, or the innocent and suffering will be involved in further trouble. Did you not notice your mother's anxiety as you sat apart in such evident disquietude of mind ? "

" No, Colonel, I did not," answered Napier : " Heaven knows I would shield her from further uneasiness. The truth is, thoughts will arise respecting Harry, which blind me to all consideration or feelings, irrespective of the mystery in which his fate is involved. But I will strive to be more guarded."

"I can tell well how acutely you feel, my friend," observed the Colonel; "for years I have had to combat dark forebodings; but we must not yield the reins to imagination. By giving way to those strange thoughts and fears, which, from the texture of our nervous system, rise up in time of trouble, to confound and harrow the reason, we render ourselves incapable of maturely considering facts as they are, when we are called upon to exercise our faculties with judgment and discretion."

CHAPTER VIII.

As the moon came forth, the threatening of rain disappeared. Napier's mind was in too unsettled a state to admit of enjoyment in intercourse with his friends, so he wandered forth across the park. All around him was calmness and tranquillity; nought of life seemed in his path; no sound broke upon the scene. The peasant had sought his cot; the labourer his home; the birds their nests; the cattle the sheltered nook by some overhanging woodland; the breeze was still; it seemed at this hour the image of a time of perfect peace. Yet the young wanderer was debarred from real enjoyment of this hour. To feel the sentiment in which nature luxuriates, and for it to hold free intercourse with the mind, the heart must not be burdened with embarrassment and care. Napier, therefore, passed heedlessly through a scene of pastoral life and

serene loveliness, without recognising the living spirit that breathed in it. Self-communing occupied his time now; thought was busily at work within him. And then the period came before his mental eye, when, with light heart and step, in boyhood's hour, he had accompanied his elder brother on those paths, and had imbibed from him a love of manly sports and daring. No wonder he should draw comparison between those days and the present time; and from the facts realized, perceive how vast the difference between the past and present, between youth's dream and manhood's mission. And, as yet, he had not gone far enough on the latter to feel, that the ashes of young hopes, which have been burnt out, may become great and valuable relics to a worldly pilgrim.

Pondering thus on a subject of such interest, Napier had wandered on, unheeding time or space. He had barely deviated from a direct line for more than a mile from the house, when, on reaching the boundary of the park, his onward course was impeded. Rousing himself from his reverie, he turned to retrace his steps; and now he seemed for the first time to be conscious that a vast change had taken place in the appearance of the weather. The

moon, which had shone so brightly when he left Vallis, was now all but eclipsed by long lines of cloud; whilst the country around hung dark and sombre in the distance. A storm was evidently brewing, and before he had gone many paces, the heavy drops which precede the thunder-shower were falling around him.

He was too far from the house to reach it before the storm would burst; and, therefore, he resolved to seek shelter under the overhanging boughs of an old oak that towered in his path. He had reached the spot, and leaned with folded arms against the trunk of the tree. Presently a lurid glow was perceptible in the east, when the silvery line of electric fluid shot forth, lighting the growing darkness. At the instant, an object caught Napier's eye that made him start eagerly forward, for his mind was filled with strange and rapid thoughts. There could be no deception, no delusion; it must be, he felt, the tall dark form of the stranger, Pearson, moving quickly by, but in a manner as if he feared to encounter observation; then all was blank again.

Napier stood for a few moments in an attitude of intense curiosity, listening to detect the direction of the footsteps taken by the stranger, when, some-

where to the left of his position, he heard the creaking of a gate, and he strode forward, bent on observing, if possible, the motions of the man whose presence there at such an hour, and whose previous conduct, were both strange and puzzling to him. Napier reached the gate, and though the storm had now burst, and he was exposed to its fury, his purpose was so fixed, that he was nothing daunted. He felt a greater interest in the movements of this stranger than he could express; he neither doubted his honesty nor mistrusted his actions. There was, however, a peculiarity in his conduct,—an emphasis in the words he had before spoken to him,—a meaning in the expression of that quick glancing eye, which strengthened, almost ratified the conviction, that his fishing mania served for some ulterior purpose; and imagination thus at play, readily led Napier to the belief that the stranger's uncouth garb was assumed to enable him, under the disguise, to advance some object with which himself or his family were connected. Every passing minute, with fancy thus let loose, was of vast importance to Napier; yet he was compelled to pause from his lack of knowledge in reference to the path the stranger had taken; for still the rain

fell, and the clouds loomed dark and heavy upon the space around. After a while, however, the hurtling storm passed on; and then the moon, though still somewhat canopied in the darkened firmament, partially disclosed the heavy shadow.

Napier, though now relieved from the darkness, could not detect the presence of the person whose steps he was anxious to pursue. He was now in the immediate neighbourhood of a small picturesque cottage, inhabited by a widow lady of the name of Churchhill, who here resided with an only daughter as her companion. The cottage stood, surrounded by a shrubbery, in a small paddock next to the field Napier had entered from the park. Baffled in his desire to trace the stranger, Pearson, he crossed the field with a lingering step, intending to reach the high road, and return by it to Vallis House. On stepping into the road, he took a long and attentive survey, evidently disinclined to give up his search; and as he became more familiar to the varying light, he was struck with the sight of a carriage, drawn up, as he perceived, at the roadside. Marvelling at so strange a circumstance, particularly as the vehicle remained stationary, he quickened his pace, thinking some accident must

have occurred. Before he had proceeded far, however, his attention was attracted from the road to the field which led to the widow's cottage, by a partially suppressed scream ; and again it was repeated. He gazed for a few moments to satisfy himself as to the position of things, when he saw persons in the meadow, evidently drawing on in the direction of the carriage ; whilst he likewise perceived, though indirectly, a second party in fierce contention, some slight distance from the first. Following the impulse of his daring nature, he cleared the hedge at a bound, and hastened to ascertain the meaning of this strange proceeding.

As he drew near, he saw the stranger, Pearson, struggling in the grasp of two ruffianly fellows, who at this instant bore him to the ground ; whilst, a little in advance, he noticed a retreating form, hurrying to the carriage, with some burden in his arms. Napier's first act was to rush to the assistance of the fallen man. At a glance he seemed to divine that theirs was a common cause ; and he seized the nearest person, who knelt above the stranger, with an iron grasp, and wrenched him backward from his hold ; but not before he received a heavy blow on the head from the other who

shared in the fray. Before Napier could turn, the person calling himself Pearson was on his feet; and casting a hasty glance upon his deliverer, he cried, as he snatched up a stake which lay upon the ground:—

“Thanks, Mr Napier, my grateful thanks; now leave these scoundrels to me—I can defend myself—and hasten to the rescue of yonder female; a foul act has been perpetrated.” And so speaking, he dealt sweeping blows on the heads of his assailants.

Napier was not backward in obeying the stranger's wishes; he rushed to the carriage, which was just on the point of moving; and seizing the horses' head-gear, resolutely strove to upset the vehicle. The postilion whipped and swore; still Napier held the plunging cattle with iron grasp. A slight pause followed; again the postilion sought to free his horses; and now, emboldened by a furious order from the occupant of the carriage to drive on, he leaned forward, and struck Napier fiercely over the head. An individual sprang from the carriage, and cried with a voice of fury,—“How dare you cross my path? Out of my way; I am in no humour to be trifled with; let go your hold or by Heaven you are a dead man.” And he plucked a pistol from his breast, and deliberately

presented it at Napier's head. For a few seconds there was a dead pause, when Napier recklessly flung himself upon the man before him; and seizing the pistol by the barrel, attempted to wrench it from his opponent's grasp. So impetuous was his attack, that he had almost borne the man to the earth, when, as he still held his grasp upon the pistol, by accident or design the weapon exploded; and Napier's hand fell shattered by his side. The horses being released, were now in motion, whilst Napier, half paralyzed by the shot, was thrown violently to the ground, as the carriage wheel came in contact with his person.

"Too late! too late!" cried the stranger, Pearson, rushing up to the scene of the past contention. "Poor fellow! so young; so gallant, and to be thus cut down! As God liveth, I will pursue *them* to the death, for *their* share in this cruel deed."

Such was the stern threat, uttered in a deep, agonized voice, as this strange man knelt by Napier's side. He then thrust his hand into his breast pocket, drew forth a phial, and poured a few drops from it between Napier's pallid lips. For some seconds he watched intently, then cried with the fervour of heartfelt gratitude: "Thank God, he has only

fainted ; he revives ;” and tearing his neckerchief off, as he perceived the blood oozing from Napier’s hand, he bound it carefully ; then taking him in his arms, with steady and cautious step bore him to the cottage. Napier was helpless, for he was not only faint from loss of blood, but stunned from the violence with which he had fallen on the hard road.

A quarter of an hour passed by, when the tall form of Mr Pearson crossed the threshold, who, without hesitation, approached Napier, and said, as he prepared to bear him from the room,—“ A conveyance is in readiness at the gate beyond ; trust yourself to me, you are in friendly hands.”

“ Such an assurance is scarcely necessary,” answered Napier, with a poor attempt to smile ; “ I am willing to accompany you.”

The stranger then placed Napier in the conveyance he had procured, kneeling by his side, and supporting him, so that the motion of the vehicle should not injure him.

In a short period the conveyance reached Vallis House with its sad freight. The family had remained up, alarmed to no slight degree at Napier’s absence. As the latter entered the house, leaning

heavily on Mr Pearson's arm, he struggled hard to pass the matter lightly off; but he overtaxed his strength, as his mother and sister sprang forward with a cry of acute distress and astonishment. He was compelled to seek support from a chair at hand. In a few grave, husky, and rapidly uttered words, Mr Pearson gave a history of the events which had occurred; and then, saying he had himself taken the liberty to despatch a messenger for Dr Powell, he left the apartment before Lady Napier's deep obligations could be uttered.

There was an expression of intense sympathy in Ellen Neville's countenance as she gazed upon this sad family group. Her lip quivered; still she roused herself; she saw that prompt and decided measures were necessary.

"Poor Charles!" she said—it was the first time since early childhood she had addressed him by his Christian name, and her hand rested a moment on his shoulder—"my prayers are for you. I leave you in good hands. I must hasten to render my best assistance to Mrs Churchill." Napier's eye, before so heavy and overcast with the film of faintness, was lit for a moment with the grace of young, rich heart-feeling. "God bless

you, Ellen!" were the only words that escaped his lips; but the sentiment conveyed in this simple prayer brought a flush of crimson to his brow, and ere it faded Ellen had glided from the room.

CHAPTER IX.

OF course the reader has guessed that William Neville exercised an alarming authority over the destiny, if not over the affections of Fanny Churchill; and that it was this young girl who had been torn from her friends by Messrs Wilton and Neville's tools, on the night that Charles Napier and Mr Pearson so boldly endeavoured to frustrate the lawless act. This young lady to whom I allude was the individual Neville had described in such glowing colours in Sir Thomas Ashtonby's rooms at Oxford, and whom he had rendered some service, as he hinted in recounting an adventure which had befallen him. He intimated pretty plainly then what his intentions were, and alluded, if we rightly remember, to the meddling interference of a stranger, whom I have discovered to have been no other than *Mr Pearson*. Though William

Neville spoke of this individual as a gaunt, ruf-
fianly fellow of the gipsy order, we must regard
him in a more respectful character ; for, in spite of
his rough exterior and uncouth attire, we have seen
him even in this early period of our history, de-
mean himself with gallantry and honour.

Mr Neville had followed up his advantage, and
had renewed an acquaintance with Fanny since his
remarks at Oxford on this subject. It appears
that he had rendered the young lady assistance in
a time of peril. She had been on a visit to an
aunt at Orchardleigh, a place about two miles dis-
tant from S——, where Mr Neville's regiment was
quartered. A fire had taken place in the cottage
at which she was resident, and Fanny in her alarm
had locked herself into her room. The other occu-
pants had escaped from personal danger, and, busy-
ing themselves in endeavouring to extinguish the
flames, did not become aware of the girl's absence
until it seemed too late to rescue her, and a terrible
hubbub arose amongst them when the truth was
known, but no one had the courage to attempt to
save the endangered party. Mr Neville had wan-
dered some distance from S—— that evening on
some secret business, and which had taken him in

the direction of Orchardleigh, consequently, when he perceived the fire, he had hastened to the scene of confusion. He heard of the nature of the fears of the party about the burning house ; and without a moment's hesitation, and certainly with a heroism which reflected credit on his courage and humanity, he seized a ladder, planted it at the window, and, despite smoke and real danger, succeeded in rescuing the young girl, whom he found crouched half-dead from fear and from the difficulty of respiration, in a corner of the apartment.

Well,—for of course a little more must be said,—he managed to learn where Fanny resided, and a short time after she had returned to her home, he renewed his acquaintance with her. As Vallis lay scarcely four miles from S——, all this was very easily done. The afternoon Neville presented himself at Mrs Churchhill's, Fanny was in her garden, busily engaged in transplanting the produce of some choice flower seeds given her by Mary Napier; and the expression of her countenance, always very sweet and pleasing, was now of an unusually animated character. A young girl, beautiful though she be, at all times seems to me to deck herself in charms which gives a surprise to even a familiar eye, as

one catches a view of her glowing cheek and sparkling glance, whilst occupied on a spring evening with the *serious* duties of gardening. *Remember her*, good reader. Pen nor pencil have never yet faithfully portrayed her secret grace. The hand, the eye, the cheek, all *speak* a love those dear companions only understand who are plucked so gently from their mother-bed, and placed with tender care in some chosen mould, one day to add their jewel to a sweet parterre.

At the time Fanny was so engaged, William Neville stood before her, and his sudden exclamation caused her to drop a plant she held in her fingers and gaze hastily around. "Ah! I am not mistaken," he said, advancing with a smile; "we meet again—happy chance that directed my steps hither." Fanny appeared in doubt. "What!" he cried, "do you not remember the vale of Orchardleigh?"

Fanny knew him now, and turned to him while embarrassed through grateful emotion, and extending her hand frankly, said:—

"However much I was startled in seeing you so unexpectedly before me, the fact has not escaped my memory of my being under weighty obligation

to you. I have often felt anxious to meet you, that I might again tender my grateful thanks for the great service you rendered me on that dreadful evening."

"I am now more than recompensed," he cried gaily. "I am trebly repaid through your remembrance. Do you not think, however," he said earnestly, as he placed his hand lightly in hers, "that I recognised you then even whilst I held you in my arms—nay, blush not. And suppose I whispered 'Fanny' now, would you start and wonder from what source I had learnt your christian name, and claimed a privilege to use it thus familiarly? Or would you wonder more if I told you that some few years ago you were my little playfellow, making sad havoc with my boy-heart? Still so it was, Fanny; and many a time and oft, since the period to which I have referred, a vision of the little fairy of Vallis Way has lent momentary sunlight to a somewhat gloomy existence."

These latter words were spoken with a touch of sadness in the tone, and Fanny gazed with interest on the face of the individual before her, saying, as if to herself, "Can it be Mr Neville; surely a few years cannot have made so great an alteration."

Neville caught the sense of her remark, and said sadly: "Yes, Fanny. I am William Neville, once the wild stag of Mowbray. Times are changed. I am not surprised you did not recognise me, though I was once your playmate at the house yonder," pointing in the direction of Vallis House, "and often battled bravely for your rights; and cannot you remember my falling into the river, in attempting to gather you some little blue flowers to keep in remembrance of me, the last evening we were together?"

"O yes; and poor Mr Henry Napier sprang in after you though he could not swim, and you were both nearly drowned. I remember the casualty well, and how sadly I was frightened," said Fanny thoughtfully. The remark seemed to affect William Neville a good deal—his gaiety was gone; however, he observed with well assumed composure:—

"My identity is established then. I am changed no doubt, but you are not; yet you are, and still remain the same,—a paradox which I will explain. You are grown from a young and joyous child into a lovely woman, but you bear the same sweet face and happy smile, only expression is chastened

now." Fanny's eyes sank before the glance of admiration that accompanied these words, and a quick blush suffused her countenance, but not of anger nor of annoyance. He had touched a chord of memory that drew out young days to view, and light rosy hours fluttered from thought to heart, and caused her to feel a gladness in that the play-mate of her young girlhood sympathized in them.

Well may Fanny have forgotten the frank, wild youth, bursting with mirth and wilfulness, who, when he visited at Vallis House, was often in her society. Nothing pleased young Neville more than to dance and sport away the hour with the sweet child. He was now a man with an appearance years in advance of his age. A life such as he had led had already commenced a degrading work. There was a shade of gloom and anxiety, evidences of riot and indulgence, lines of a character on the face that clouded the former gay and happy expression—he was so tall too; still she was satisfied. She saw in William Neville all that was agreeable.

Having settled to a purpose, it can be supposed that William Neville soon convinced this young simple girl, after a *casual* meeting or two, that her

sweet face and touching confidence had made sad havoc with his heart. And Fanny, she had lived her little day in an isolated spot, remote from society; seldom hearing of love and its delusions, though she had thought of the former, perhaps, wonderingly: but she wondered no longer now; her air and manner proved she had met with an episode in her daily history. She wandered a little into an ideal world, then found a ray from a sunbeam draw out into a something tangible and lifelike, refusing to blend, yet hovering around and about her common hourly thoughts—in fact she loved; another kind of plant was nurtured now.

Neville had progressed almost as much as he anticipated. He had deluded her with skill—he knew well how to *talk*; few better; it was a trick he had learnt a long time before. Though there might be dissimulation in his meaning, there was none to be detected in his voice; that was frank, open, confidential. He often managed to be near her. Her lonely walks had other intent than fancied exercise. He explained, without being questioned, his position in his father's household; at least he told a well-concocted tale, which heaped a vast amount of odium, by imputation, on his

stern parent, and thus obtained the young girl's sympathy ; and when the stern, dark man crossed Fanny's path, and told her not to trust her gallant lover, she fled as a scared fawn from a wolf, and consented to meet Mr Neville *now and then* in a little arbour at the edge of a small shrubbery in her mother's garden. This was all easily managed, as Mrs Churchhill was confined to her room, and the only servant of the household was devoted to Mr Neville's interests. Fanny, of course, was very wilful and indiscreet, and all that sort of thing ; but rarely does reason take much part,—in fact this grave light seems suddenly to burn uncommonly dim when the vision of love, pictured with glowing and ardent words, presents itself to the excited sympathies of a young and inexperienced girl, and casts a bright blush along the face of things.

He had bound her to secrecy ; she had promised to obey him : a little while, she thought, and he would remove the seal from her lips, and claim her as his wife,—and so she loved, loved without thinking what her conduct would entail upon her. Indeed, she had not questioned herself at all ; she never thought of asking herself whether he, who had so suddenly fascinated her, would be for life a

kind and watchful friend, her guide and counselor, a real companion, and considerate lover. She thought not, and this is a fact often experienced. Yet, whilst we really love, existence rolls away in the luxury of thought; but the thought Fanny required should be of another character. She loved, poor girl; and had you, dear reader, with a friend's warrant, acted as Mr Pearson did, and warned her of danger, she would have turned indignantly and said:

"What! should love pause and question that cold, suspicious monitor, 'common sense,' and thus calculate with a worldly craft before it trusts with faith and fervour!" And had you answered "Yes, if it wishes to distinguish between the real and the fictitious," she would have turned away and declared you were blinded by the world's harshest prejudice.

We must now return to our friends Neville and Wilton, who were seated over their wine at the hotel in S——, and busily engaged in talking over their plans.

"Now, Neville, you are in the right vein; you have just cause to be vain of your powers, and surely your pride (he knew his man well) will

never permit you to knock under to a love-sick girl's silly anger. We understand one another now; however, be cautious how you get to the lodge; on my return from my visit the other day, I was not over satisfied with my position."

"What do you mean?" Neville asked; "to what do you allude?"

"Oh, a little event happened which I meant to have concealed from you, fearing danger would have scared you off altogether; though, by Heaven, if this gipsy fisher, poacher, spy, should chance to thrust himself between *me* and an affair of *mine*, I should take the matter less complacently than *you* are disposed to do," answered Wilton with point, touching the vain man, as he knew, on a vulnerable part.

"In the devil's name, what *do* you mean," cried he passionately; "out with it, man; with or without purpose, I do not relish your insinuation."

Wilton replied very coolly, "Why, the fact is, Neville, that Napier's ally, your inquisitive friend Pearson, has obtained a clue to the hiding-place of your fair Fanny. A few evenings ago, as I was returning from the performance of my mission,—you remember the tender billet you despatched by my

hand,—after skirting the wood for some distance, I crossed by Westland Flats, with a view of coming into the high road below Henley, to baffle suspicion, presuming I had been noticed. I was clear of the wood, and was crossing a meadow at an easy canter, when I chanced to turn in my saddle, and I then perceived a horseman rapidly gaining upon me. I thought it might be the owner of the land, so I roused Napoleon, and made good running for half a mile, without turning to the right or left, taking several awkward fences in my course. When about the distance mentioned from the start, I thought I could safely investigate the state of affairs, when I found I was hotly pursued, not by Farmer, or stranger, unless *you* feel disposed to class our inquisitive friend Pearson with the latter. Well, I changed my course, steamed away to the left, and came down upon Marston brook at its widest part: he was after me; there was no blinking the fact, for the crash through the last fence I had crossed proved he was close at hand. I raced at the brook, expecting to pound him there at all events; but the fellow came down with reckless riding, and had a view of my face, and whether intentional or not, he crossed my path not more

than three or four strides from the leap, swerving his horse from the bank as he shot by. My brute, from having been baulked, pitched short, and fell over into the stream, leaving me sprawling in the mud. When I scrambled up the bank, I saw our friend crossing the stream in sportsman-like style a little above, as if to jeer me. My first feeling was to challenge him, and demand a reason for his conduct; but I glanced at myself, and saw my miserable plight, and felt the fellow would have laughed at me if I had done so. However, one thing is certain, he is something different from what he appears, and that he did not pursue me so hotly for nothing; and another point is settled in my own mind, he shall answer some day for having done so."

At another time Neville would have laughed heartily at his friend's disaster; and even now he could not resist exclaiming:

"Why, the fellow has made you as familiar with water as himself (alluding, we may presume, to Mr Pearson's fishing propensity), and how provident of him to commit you to so soft a bed!" and seeing his companion's annoyance, he continued, "Fancy the pink of jockeys put *hors de combat* by such an

ill-conditioned boor." Neville paused a few moments to enjoy Wilton's mortification, and then said :—

"By Jove! you could not have applied a more effectual spur. I will go forward with a vengeance, if only to encounter this gipsy of the vale and stream. Confound it," he added with a laugh, "what will become of our privileges, if such low fellows are permitted to cross us in our pastimes! Now, Wilton, I am heart and soul with you."

"To action, then," cried Wilton, as he rang the bell for his servant. On the man's appearance, he said :—

"Wilkins, Mr Neville wishes to see Johnson. Step over to the beerhouse in Market Street; he is sure to be there at this hour, and tell him to come here at once."

"Excuse my delivering the message in your name, Neville," remarked Wilton, as his man left the room to obey orders. "Wilkins, you know, has an inkling that Johnson is in your pay, and as these men should never know too much, if we can avoid it, why I thought it would be as well for him to think it is about the same affair you require him now."

"I admire your discretion and foresight," answered Neville with a sneer. "A discreet man seldom betrays himself, *experience* tells us that; and a little worldly knowledge informs us that a selfish one will betray his friend to protect himself."

"Not so bad that," was replied calmly. "On my honour there is something quite practical in the conclusion to which you arrive. Friendship, you know, Neville, has its silent influences,—only it is wise to fix a discreet medium to their operation."

"Yes, yes, to preserve the felicitous reputation you have acquired," was the rejoinder; and this banter might have continued,—for Neville's restless and fevered mind found relief in sarcasm,—if Wilton's man had not returned and informed his master he had met Johnson in the street, but that he refused to come to the hotel, as it was not safe to do so; but if they would go to his house in Clare Street, he would meet them in an hour.

"Curse his caution," muttered Neville. "What a night to thread the dirty streets to the fellow's den! however, I suppose we must do it." He arose and gazed from the window: the rain was falling fast; the gusts caused the old casement to

rattle, whilst the scene without was gloomy and sombre enough.

"Better as it is," observed Wilton; "we shall encounter but few people at this hour: ten to one he is in liquor now, and I don't particularly wish our connexion with him to be suspected."

After some time had elapsed, Messrs Wilton and Neville sauntered carelessly forth, and wended their way to the place of appointment. They had to pass through a low neighbourhood, as it was in the narrowest and dirtiest of the streets that the man they sought occasionally lived. With some difficulty, —for the wind swept violently about them,—the passage which led to the house was hit upon, when, by dint of groping and perseverance, they gained their object, and Wilton tapped cautiously at a door against which he now stood. With as little delay it was as cautiously opened, and a voice said, "All right; follow me."

"But show a light," cried Neville, floundering into a dark chamber of this dilapidated tenement.

"Not for a hundred," answered the voice before heard. "Suppose that fellow who is looking so sharply after me should have tracked me here, or

you, and should break in upon us ; why, I fancy in this darkness he could hardly distinguish me from my visitors. Ha ! ha ! what a lark, if you should find yourselves in the stone jug in mistake for Bob Johnson !”

“ Well, well, it is of little moment ; we can talk as well in the dark as in the light,” remarked Wilton. “ I rather approve of your caution, Johnson, it is safer for all parties ; although, as far as your friend Pearson is concerned, I should have thought you would like to have an interview with him, for thrusting himself between you and your work the other night.”

“ I fancy my other pals would,” was the reply. “ You should see the poor devils just now. That fellow hits hard, I know, for those men are a match for most, single-handed ; but he floored ’em both in quick time. Pearson, or whatever his name is, has given and received some hard blows in his time, or he could never have done what he did. Keep out of his way, gen’lemen, if you don’t want more than would be agreeable for the ladies to see you with. But now, what ’s in the wind ? Can I be of service?”

“ You see, the young lady you helped to bear off

has a liking for my friend Mr Neville here ; and he, you know, and all that sort of thing, wants to gratify her fancy with as little fuss as possible ; but she thinks her delicacy has been outraged, and so on, and wants to be set at liberty. As affairs stand, that is impossible ; for you know what has happened to that very busy-body young hero, Mr Napier. So for our safety it is necessary to bind this lass to Mr Neville. How can it be done ?”

The man answered shortly : “ *You* have come to propose some plan. *I* have no head to scheme, though I have a hand to put one in execution ; so out with your views.”

“ I have been thinking,” said Wilton, “ we could get up a sham marriage. Amongst your acquaintance you can pick out some decently well educated fellow that would answer our purpose for the nonce. He need not know too much. Take him blindfold to the place and from it ; and choose some one who will drown curiosity in liberal pay. After this is arranged, I have another job for you.”

“ One affair at a time,” cried Johnson ; “ my memory is not so good as it was. In two days I will provide everything,—license, priest, and register. I know a field-preacher, a regular Methodist,

with a perfect parson phiz, that will do the job capitally, and ask no questions, so that he is well feed."

"Agreed," replied Wilton; "and we trust the arrangement to you, and good pay awaits success. Take this to commence with. Here, where is your hand,—there is a £5 note for you, and I will be here to-morrow night to hear how you progress in your business;" and, groping their way out, the worthy pair retraced their steps to their hotel.

"Well," said the man named Johnson, as he fumbled in his pocket for flint and steel to strike a light, "they will come down liberal for this job, I fancy, because I see how it would be, if that lass got back to Vallis House. What a pal Wilton would make. He a gentleman, and I,—well, 'tis bad taste, and a waste of the raw material, as my friend the parson says, to give oneself bad names," and he laughed as he struck the flint. The tinder lit, and soon a candle threw a flickering light around. The laugh had hardly passed, when, as the man bent with gloating eye over the note, an almost noiseless step crossed the chamber. Ever on his guard, for his profession rendered his senses keen, and every sound a danger, the man caught the step,

and, thrusting the note in his pocket, wheeled round and confronted his visiter. Scarcely had he time to mutter the oath which rises to such men's lips when suddenly surprised, when a strong grasp was upon him, and a voice of stern emphasis said : " In vain you struggle. I have watched for many nights in this den for you. I know all that has passed. You are my prisoner."

" We 'll see to that," answered the man so addressed ; and, quite alive to his position, he grappled fiercely with the stranger ; but he had more than his match. Stepping back to give impetus to his blow, Johnson was met with so severe a buffet that he was sent staggering to the floor. The stranger stood over the prostrate ruffian with contracted brow and with the flush of stern determination in his countenance, as he took up the light which had not been extinguished, and gazed into the face of the man at his feet, who seemed stunned through his heavy fall. As the latter revived, the stranger said :—

" Now, hear me,—self-preservation, with men of your stamp, is the first consideration. I will give you your liberty on certain conditions. Do as I require, and you are safe, and shall be well

rewarded. Act falsely towards me, and within twenty-four hours you shall be lodged in jail. You must apparently advance your late employers' foul scheme; but secretly, you must execute plans which I shall mature. Do you comply?" There was so indomitable a spirit of command and resolution in the stranger's manner, that the ruffian was evidently cowed. At first, however, he gazed into his opponent's face with a dogged, sullen air; but as he seemed to recognise the individual before him, he cried, "I thought from the voice you were Squire Napier, but I see you aint. Mr Pearson, you hit main hard; you be one too many for I. I'll do as you bid; if I don't mistake, your's 'ill be a better service than Wilton's, after all; beside, just for novelty, like, I should not object to have a turn at a job with justice to back me up, instead of knocking up my heels, like your honour did mine just now."

"Then follow me hence," observed Mr Pearson, for Johnson was right in his conjecture. "There is no alternative for you; escape you cannot; we go forth together; and to Farmer Willis's, in Vallis Way. I give you fair warning; you have proved my strength; one thought in opposition to my

valescent, his favourite lounge, whilst he was confined to the house, was in a balcony which commanded a view of the Valley. Here Mary was his companion : but for her he would have been sadly ennuied ; but her love learnt the customs of his thoughts. Even in the midst of mental uneasiness there was a charm in this intercourse ; this free interchange of feelings with one whom he loved and treasured with so true an interest, gave solidity and character to his affections ; for if the fears and confidence of true affection cannot be explained, well do they who have experienced the throb of the latter know what courage it will inspire, how boldly it will labour to fortify our intellect and reason, to preserve the object of it from trouble or from care.

Mary Napier evinced some curiosity in reference to Mr Pearson's conduct ; and on this morning, Napier had not taken his accustomed seat long before his sister joined him ; and, after some casual remark, she pointed to the Vale, and said,—

“ Yes! *he* is there again ; and see, Charles, the fishing mania is on him still.”

“ Why, Mary,” remarked her companion ; “ this man seems to have made a deep impression on your

imagination ; his name is ever on your lips ; but for his uncouth appearance, my little nurse, I should really think our gipsy hero had bewitched you."

Mary's cheek flushed, as she smiled, and said,—

" Say puzzled, instead of bewitched, and you will be right, Charles ; for I candidly own this stranger has supplied me with a great deal to speculate on. For instance, to account for my feelings, his speech to you by the river side, the other day, was very singular ; then, when he brought you in to us on the night of that terrible encounter, I saw his lip quiver from excess of emotion ; and, besides, as I passed my arm round your neck, to support you, my hand came in contact with his, and it was as cold and clammy as death. These instances of feeling and nervousness, though becoming to true courage, are rarely experienced by one over whom, as appearances go, we have no claim, and who seems so utter a stranger to us. Then, again, I remember he crossed my poor father's path when we were strolling through the Vale, a short time before you returned from Oxford. Both seemed singularly affected. My father muttered about ' the grave '—and I thought I caught the words,— ' giving up its dead ; ' whilst this person's glance of

grave, brooding melancholy quite startled me. I am sure his lips moved, whilst the expression of his face was of interest, blended with pity." Mary paused, but there was that in the countenance which seemed to say, "I have something of more moment to reveal." And Napier perceiving all this, for he easily read his sister's heart, said,—

"There must be no secret between us, dear one?"

"There shall not be, Charles, and I will tell you what occurred the other day; it was during the time you were delirious. I had been watching by you, and my mother insisted on my taking a walk through the Valley with Ellen Neville. I assented, and we strolled forth together. As we were returning by the grotto walk, we came abruptly on the individual I have mentioned. He was leaning against the old ash, at the edge of the cliff on which, if you remember, Harry carved his name, just before his leaving us. Mr Pearson did not perceive us until we were close upon him. He seemed confused for a moment; however, the emotion was transient; and then, he inquired after your health in a voice of intense earnestness. I would have spoken, but the truth is," and her eyes even now filled with tears as they rested on her brother,

"I thought you would die, Charles, and I foolishly burst into tears. Ellen spoke to him in her grave calm way, and said, 'You were very ill, but Dr Powell had hopes that your good constitution would bear you safely through the danger.' He remarked, 'God grant it; if not, man's vengeance shall be sharp and deadly.' He saw me shudder at his terrible threat, accompanied by an emphasis which left no doubt of his fulfilling it; and stepping forward he took my hand in both his own, and with feeling in the face, contrasting strangely with its former expression, and with a solemn earnestness and intelligence which awed me, he said, 'Tell him, dear lady, that he has the warm prayers of the stranger whose life he saved; and that he has sworn an oath to redress the injuries through which he is in part suffering.' And as he spoke, it may have been fancy, but I cannot help thinking his glance wandered to poor Harry's name that was engraven on the rock close by."

"Well," said Napier, after a few minutes' reflection, "all this is strange, certainly. I must renew my acquaintance with Mr Pearson. His will to serve us is strong, but his reason for doing so inexplicable."

"What, brooding still, Mary? You are less confidential than I could wish."

"Oh! it is not that," she answered, blushing ingenuously. "I have longed to tell you all that concerns me, but I have feared to cause you undue excitement. However, as you question my frankness, I will tell you all. You must learn then, Charles, that a few days prior to my father's death, he placed a letter in my hands, begging me not to open it for three months after his decease. I obeyed his last wish, and, when the period expired, made myself acquainted with its contents. I perused the page with much pain and concern, as it told me of an injustice which he had done his relations. You know the history of his trust, his rejection of Mr Curran, and the estrangement which took place in consequence between him and my aunt Julia. All this, he says, you know, and that he has entailed the duty upon you to seek out the daughter of his departed sister, and to befriend her to the utmost of your ability. To me he says, that the property which should have gone to his sister has descended to me, and he conjures me to make a provision for my cousin when she is discovered, whether she come to us in honour or in shame. Likewise, he

remarks, more as a fond anxious hope than a wish, that, should Walter Curran return to this country and seek us out (for he clings to the idea that the wound his nephew received in some engagement in India did not prove fatal to his life), you should receive him as a brother; and, if we found him the highly-gifted and accomplished gentleman he had been represented, in course of time, provided he was disposed to honour me with his regard, I should reciprocate it; thus intimating, that by my cousin's marriage with me, he may be restored to the property of which his parents were deprived. My father urges this point, and implores me to contract no engagement for at least two years, telling me that he had written to his nephew, acknowledging the injustice he had done him, and that his last prayer was, that he might be recompensed through me for the injuries he had inflicted. Thus, Charles, you see I have cause to be very uncomfortable. I wish to obey my father's request in reference to this, and I will freely give up every thing, for I want little beyond the love of friends, and a home in their hearts; but to be contracted in marriage, as it were, to a stranger, though a relative, is an idea opposed to all my precon-

ceived regard for feminine delicacy, and enough to occasion me greater uneasiness than I can express."

Napier, knowing, through report, that circumstances had arisen which assured him his sister would never be so tried, said, with much feeling: "Dismiss your fears, Mary; poor Walter Curran will never come amongst us. My father was right in his belief that the wound he had received was not mortal. He rallied, so my information runs, to the astonishment of his friends, and obtained leave to return to visit Spain. He embarked in the M—— East Indiaman; the ill-starred vessel was wrecked on the French coast in January or February last. I remember the sad casualty, but little thought then, that one who had so strong a claim on our affection was amongst the number who found a watery grave."

"From whom did you ascertain these facts?" asked Mary, sadly agitated. "Oh! how sorry I am I said one word that would appear"—She could say no more, but blushing deeply (had her heart *dreamt* of the gallant soldier?), she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"I heard this sad news from Dr Powell some

time ago," answered Napier, when he saw his sister had partly recovered from agitation: "A few of the crew were saved, but only one passenger, and that was the individual we have heard mention of, of the name of Langton—It accounts for much that perplexed me until I became aware of this circumstance—poor Walter and Mr Langton were warm friends."

"Poor fellow," murmured Mary: "Does Mr Langton speak of him, Charles—does he say he thought kindly of us?"

"He says but little on this head—so Dr Powell tells me; he is quite grave and taciturn on the subject; but when he touches on the trials his friend had to encounter in his early career, he is much affected; there must have been an unusual bond of friendship existing between them."

"Oh! now I am all anxiety to meet Mr Langton, though I doubt not he is inclined to judge us very harshly; but I will do my utmost to convince him how earnestly we wished to welcome his friend amongst us." She paused, conscience called up the tell-tale blush, and Napier smiled gravely at this slight change of opinion on Mary's part.

Napier rapidly improved in health, and now com-

menced his arrangements to effect the great object so near his heart. Yet he did not neglect the interests of those with whom he was connected. In reference to Fanny Churchill, however, his hands were tied by a significant intimation that she had found a true friend at the hour of her greatest danger. This Dr Powell assured him, but professed an inability to be more communicative. For some reason the affair was carefully concealed from Colonel Neville; a few only knew the nature of the affray, therefore it was not difficult to mislead the opinion of the people, who were inquisitive on the subject of Napier's illness. Indeed, it was understood, pretty generally at least, that his accident had arisen from an encounter with poachers; and such was the perversion of facts, that Mr Pearson was hinted at, by some members of Colonel Neville's family, even as the ringleader in the assault.

Of course it will be concluded, that Napier had taken no steps in reference to Mr Wilton's significant intimation through his lawyer, in regard to the demand he had upon his brother. To this Napier now directed his attention, and addressing Colonel Neville upon the subject, begged him to obtain the services of his lawyer, Mr Dyson, and

likewise to give him an opportunity of meeting Mr Langton. Napier's wishes were complied with, and, on the morning specified, he intimated his hope to Mary that she would accompany him to Mowbray. His slightest request was law to her : Charles was indeed her own dear brother, so wise and thoughtful in the opinion of her young and inexperienced mind.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the arrival of the Napiers at Mowbray, they were met with genuine interest and friendship. Colonel Neville's hand yet held that of Napier's, as he turned to an individual standing some distance from them, and said :—

“ Charles, to you an introduction is not necessary ; in Mr Langton you see a true friend—But I forget, Miss Napier,” he added, bending with courtesy to Mary, who was engaged with Ellen—“ you are unacquainted with Mr Langton ; I beg to present him as my valued guest.”

Mary Napier's countenance wore a sweet ingenuous blush, as she turned and bent in acknowledgment of the introduction ; but when her eye turned to Mr Langton's face, she visibly started : she was evidently oppressed with some singular and strange sensation. She uttered not a word, though he ad-

dressed some passing remark to her ; but as she passed into the house with Ellen Neville, she said :

“ Dear Ellen, a thousand vague fancies crowd upon my mind. Can I have seen that face before, or am I subject to the wildest illusion ? ”

Ellen Neville smiled, as she answered kindly :
“ Dear one, you have led a sad secluded life of late ; low spirits and nervousness sport cruelly with the imagination and cause us to start

‘ At e’en our own shadow that strikes on the wall. ’ ”

As the ladies disappeared, Mr Langton advanced to Napier, and shook him warmly by the hand, remarking with much feeling :—

“ I have been grieved to learn how much you have suffered of late. I have not had a full explanation of facts which led to your disaster, but have gleaned sufficient to know that your daring nearly cost you your life. I hope you have not acted rashly in leaving your room ; you are looking a different man now to what you were when we met at Oxford. ”

“ I have been ill, ” answered Napier, “ and gray hairs would say I deserved to have been so for my folly, and that young men are very foolish and headstrong ; however, we country gentlemen,

Colonel, must expect hard rubs when we have too keen an eye to our *interests*." Napier so spoke, for Colonel Neville was standing with much concern and uneasiness depicted in his countenance, and to change the subject, he further said to Mr Langton :—

"I notice a vast change in you; you are more robust, and, it seems, in far better health than when we met."

"Oh, I have been ruralizing," was the reply. "A country life works wonders with one fagged and jaded from the worry of the busy world. In so pure and invigorating an air as this, an invalid gets sound and strong without fuss or effort."

Napier found Mr Dyson present, and after having greeted the lawyer, said :—

"An accident has some time deterred me from consulting you on a matter of family importance."

Mr Dyson bent his head, and his glance seemed to question the propriety of Mr Langton's presence. Napier so read it, for he observed :—

"I wish to bring Mr Langton to our counsel and assistance." And then, in a brief and emphatic manner he sketched the position of affairs in reference to his brother, dwelling on the period of his

absence, his utter silence, till he came to the significant inquiry instituted through his lawyer by Mr Wilton: then he paused; he seemed to have said all that was necessary for his present purpose.

Mr Langton's face was partially turned from the council-table. As Napier dwelt with emphasis on his brother's protracted silence, the countenance of the former exhibited certain confusion of mind, or surprise; and when Napier read the letter he had received from Wilton's lawyer, Mr Langton seemed scarcely able to control his feelings. "Unparalleled impudence," he said; "a rare ground-plan to a work of villany," and he rose from his chair and strode to the window.

Napier now asked Mr Dyson how he should proceed. The lawyer looked perplexed; he was a sound thinker, and well skilled in the science of his profession, but here his acumen was at fault, his very argument evinced how much he was bewildered.

"It requires a more far-seeing eye than mine, Mr Napier," he said, "to pierce the covering by which the affair is veiled from the sight. There is no cause, as far as we can see, for secrecy; yet it is preserved by Mr Wilton, as we perceive, to an un-

usual degree." He paused for a few moments, and seemed to reflect; then he further added, "One point we have lost sight of; the fact of this bond, if ever given, proves that there must have been a much more intimate connexion existing between Sir Henry and Mr Wilton, than the latter was disposed to admit, during your interview with him at Oxford, Mr Napier; and thus, as Mr Wilton must see, if Sir Henry's absence continues, you will be justified (holding so significant an intimation of companionship) in examining into Mr Wilton's connexion with Sir Henry with an eye of suspicion and stern inquiry. He deceived you at Oxford, that is plain; why he should have done so, is the question. The case is certainly an extraordinary one; time only can aid us."

"Do you know this Mr Whittaker? I mean the lawyer employed by Mr Wilton," asked Mr Langton.

"I do know him," was the answer.

"What reputation has he obtained, Mr Dyson?"

"*He is up to his work,*" answered the lawyer, with a smile. "I won't say more, for it is a good rule and a safe one, to avoid maligning a neighbour, when you know you cannot praise him, par-

ticularly if he be of the same profession as oneself."

"I can be less guarded," remarked Colonel Neville; "were he here, I would tell him that his damnable sophistry deluded me for years, and that a more unprincipled vagabond does not exist." Whilst Colonel Neville was speaking, a servant entered and handed a card to his master. "Speak of the devil," &c., he muttered—"Shall he be admitted, Charles? See, the visit is to you. I wonder he has the temerity to trust himself within the park gates of Mowbray; nothing equals the impudence of these methodistical hypocrites."

"By all means let us learn his errand," remarked Mr Dyson; "we may glean something from him,"—and Mr Whittaker was admitted to the council-room.

The lawyer entered with a self-satisfied simpering air, with that queer unmeaning smile which the sycophant can assume on occasion. He was in age perhaps verging on fifty-five; bald, or nearly so, with a countenance very much the colour of the parchments he was familiar with. He may have been taken for the parent of that respectable youth "Uriah Heep," or Uriah himself, after his dose of

solitary confinement. There was the same latent cunning in the eye, the wreathed traits of vice about the mouth, and over the whole face the stamp of falsehood, which Nature, as if proud of its evil work, could not allow even a lawyer's art to gloss over.

It was evident Mr Whittaker was aware his reception would not be very flattering, and that he had decided on his course. He was really condescending in his notice of Mr Dyson, bowed with well affected deference to Colonel Neville, unheeding the Colonel's haughty deportment, glanced with something like surprise at Mr Langton, and, approaching Napier, said, as his eye rested on his own letter which was open on the table:—

“As I have received no reply to a letter which I was instructed to address to you by my client Mr Wilton, I have thought it necessary to wait on you in person in reference thereto. Not finding you at Vallis House, I have taken the liberty of following you hither.”

“So I conclude, sir, from your presence in this room,” answered Napier, dryly. “Be so good as to state your purpose in seeking this interview: speak freely, these gentlemen are my friends,”

pointing to Colonel Neville and Mr Langton, "and Mr Dyson is my legal adviser."

Mr Whittaker bowed again even more obsequiously than before, and turning one hand in and out of the other, as he glanced on his brother practitioner, said with the old simper:—

"You cannot be more ably advised. Now to business, dear sir. Of course you must be aware my client is anxious to ascertain the nature of the reply, which I have some time expected, to the letter I had the honour of addressing to you."

Napier held a whispering conversation with Mr Dyson, and then said, "If you will inform me when the bond in question was given, I shall be able to state whether I have received intelligence of my brother, since the document was signed."

Mr Whittaker's cunning eye was slightly sneering, as it met Mr Dyson's for a moment, and he said, "I am really unable to answer you, for my client has not thought it necessary to intrust me with the document in question; but I should think, in fairness and courtesy, Mr Napier, you cannot object to inform me when you look for your brother's return."

"Not quite so fast, Mr Whittaker," was the answer; "I now hand you over to Mr Dyson."

Colonel Neville forbore speaking with evident difficulty; there was an impatience in his manner, which a less discriminating eye than Mr Whittaker's would have perceived. The man of law saw all this plainly enough, but concluding the business now lay between him and Mr Dyson, to be entered on elsewhere, he turned to the master of the house, and after subjecting him to a long scrutiny, remarked:—"Some time has elapsed since we met, Colonel Neville. You are not what you were; the world is beginning to question the cause of your seclusion. You must come amongst us at S——; we require your acute intellect on the bench; we have always work in hand."

"I doubt not, when base, bad men rule, the lower orders are sure to become sensual and vicious." Such was the stern rejoinder, and the speaker turned away in haughty disdain, fearful, perhaps, of committing himself further under his own roof.

"We had rather an interesting case of *forgery* to investigate the other day," remarked Mr Whittaker; "I have the minutes of evidence in my

pocket: would it interest you to peruse them, Colonel Neville?"

Colonel Neville started as if a dagger had pierced him; he leant heavily against the window-frame for support, and his form visibly shook from some sudden internal conflict. Mr Langton's eye was upon him, and before the man of law had time to congratulate himself on the success of his venomous probe, he had crossed the room and opened the door; then striding up to Mr Whittaker, he laid his hand upon his shoulder and said:—"You understand me, sir; relieve us of your presence or I will hurl you through the window." The lawyer heeded Mr Langton's command; a drop into the courtyard could be in no way desirable. He reached the door, when, turning on the threshold, he remarked in a manner, the only alteration of which, from his former bearing, was a considerable extension of the simper:—"I shall see you in the morning, Mr Dyson; and by the way, Mr Langton, Mr Wilton desired me to present his compliments to you, and say his horse Napoleon is quite at your service, if you wish to become a purchaser," and he was gone.

A smile of peculiar character flitted athwart

Langton's face, and Napier looked dissatisfied and surprised; the former noticed it, and said:—"I should have told you that Mr Wilton and I have become close allies; we have had many a little transaction together since I parted from you at Oxford."

"Indeed," remarked Napier gravely, and for the first time a suspicion of Langton's sincerity entered his mind; but it was but of momentary endurance, as an earnest, truth-sounding voice whispered, "And my reasons, believe me, for seeking such an acquaintance are not inimical to your interests."

Dr Powell, who was generally very punctual to his engagements, entered the withdrawing room at Mowbray some little time before the consultation with Mr Dyson was concluded in the library, and was therefore able to indulge in a short interview with the two fair girls then present. There was no reserve about him now; his countenance beamed with satisfaction; but it would have puzzled a very acute eye to have decided in which of the ladies his interest was most vested. The doctor's cheerful air warranted Ellen Neville's remark, that he "had returned from his ramble with every indication of renovated health and spirits."

"Yes, I returned last night, Miss Neville," he said, "and although you smile, I flatter myself you quite enter into my feelings. You feel how refreshing it must be for one fatigued through the dull depressing character of worldly labour, to throw off the burden, hie away from the machinery of toil, and ruralize for a period in some secluded spot, where the heart may sing again the songs of early days."

"Can the practical Englishman of fifty recognise the principle of so primitive a luxury?" asked Ellen Neville with a smile.

"Yes, if the thirst for gain does not grow into a fell ambition,—if he recognises the forbidden fruit in unlawful ends, and gives to the national error 'selfishness' his thought rather than his heart."

"Well, what are your occupations, whilst you follow your peculiar pleasure?" questioned Ellen now; "do you bear to your quiet glen some learned medical work, and, under the shelter of the hawthorn-hedge, bursting may be into a sheet of fragrant blossom, make yourself familiar with the matter it contains?"

"No, no, Miss Neville," answered Dr Powell; "there is a time for all things; the library for pro-

fessional study, and a thankful heart alone for study of the beautiful gifts of nature. The labour you describe does not harmonize with the situation you put me into. Do you know, as example of my taste, I would rather have a gleeful, happy child by me, when lingering over the budding charms of spring, and luxuriate in thought about so expressive a sympathy between the animate and inanimate creation, than the rarest work man's intellect could mature. I love the outer life ; I love the language of the beautiful world, its genius and its ministry ; its truths and counsellings are voices from a higher dome, and they are never still."

The speaker paused for a little while, and then he said quite gaily: " Shall I particularize my labours? Well, then, when I am away in the country I rise very early and get my breakfast over, and then I fling my plaid across my shoulders and stroll forth. I explore the hillside, vale, and coppice, and pluck, from places quite unknown to less curious eyes, some little tiny plants, and win their secrets from them ; for I am somewhat of an herbalist, you know. On my return from my ramble I rest a while, and then most thoroughly enjoy my dinner. After this meal, if there be light enough, I ramble

through the old churchyard, and make myself familiar with the many simple mementoes which tell of the mourner's sorrow, and consciousness or belief in virtues interred. It is an old-fashioned practice which I quite venerate, connecting it as we must with the simple feelings and manners of a rural district, and I treasure up these heart-breathings, and glean the truth that worldly wisdom is not necessarily the parent of faith and sincerity. Indeed, the kindly act of the meanest peasant is a study: he is less a waif on our human shore than he who rolls in wealth and acts less simply."

Mary Napier's sweet soft face was full of a melancholy, and yet bright intelligence, as she remarked:—

"I think with you in one sense; but then your thoughts are so much more experienced than mine. In your creed you find an antidote to the blights which fall upon the warm impulses of youth. There is a time when storm and tempest prostrate the beauty that enchanted the eye, and its place is void."

"Not void," replied Dr Powell gently; "not void, dear Miss Napier. Its image has met with sympathy; and though absent a little while, you

may find it again, and reproduced by the same *care* which gave it life. The laws of nature, dear lady," he added, for he well understood the force of the young mourner's words, "are simple and intelligible. Sorrow attends their fulfilment: it is a natural order, the human dowry." Dr Powell checked himself here, for he feared to trespass on the silent sorrow of the young heart.

Before further remark was uttered, the consulting party entered the drawing-room. Ellen Neville greeted the guests of the day with gentle courtesy, but it was not so with Mary Napier. As Mr Langton advanced and addressed her, she started in a nervous, agitated manner; whilst her countenance, before so pale, quite crimsoned. He bent a fleeting glance of interest upon her, and passed on to the window; but why Mary was so agitated in the presence of Mr Langton, she could not herself say. His manner had been simply courteous and earnest; with the graceful pride which seems so natural, and which is so becoming to attractive manhood, there was mingled much simplicity of demeanour, which many would have said was inviting rather than repelling; however, she seemed to fear him, but could not account

for the impulse that influenced the emotion. She bent her head over a book as Mr Langton passed on, and seemed deeply engaged in its perusal. Shortly she perceived Dr Powell pass her, and join Mr Langton, as she supposed, for a party near her held a whispering conversation. At first, Mary thought of moving away, but she felt quite incapable of taking so *decided* a step as that of walking by the gentlemen to the other end of the room, and so she sat still, with a heart fluttering at the thought, that she was becoming, as it were, unconsciously familiar with remarks made by the gentlemen near.

"After all, was it discreet and wise?" remarked Dr Powell, so Mary discovered.

"Decidedly the only course. Our friend Pearson penetrated to the secret of her heart. The step taken shields her from a temptation which might have worked out her ruin. Home could be no home now—she must suffer somewhat for her indiscretion, but her honour is protected."

"*My first successful labour: God grant I may still succeed,*" was then added, with a fervour of tone which caused Mary's nerves to thrill; and she was about to rise from her seat oppressed, almost

beyond endurance, in being so painfully situated, when Dr Powell observed, with marked emphasis, in reply to his companion :—

“A noblerevenge: I fear, though, you are too late.”

At this period dinner was announced, and Mary crossed the apartment resting on the arm of Mr Langton. The remarks she had heard gave a new direction to the flow of her thoughts, and nervousness was overcome. Curiosity bewildered her. What could be the true signification of “*My first successful labour*,” uttered in a fervid, almost inspired tone, with the glow of enthusiasm, of heroic daring in it. One thing was evident, Mr Langton was something more than a temporary visitor in the neighbourhood ; something apart from personal interest or pleasure was reflected through the remark which followed his—“*A noble revenge*.” Not such revenge, Mary felt, as angry passions seek to propitiate their wrath, or the redress of injury by violence, but revenge of a nobler caste and character, the return of good for evil—the fruit of a magnanimity reared by high impulse, and tended by the behests of a pure and happy conscience.

Unconsciously her thoughts now reverted to the words uttered by Pearson to her brother. Those

words, evincing a marked integrity of thought, rose up in her mind, and stood side by side with the expressive and earnest allusion made by Mr Langton, and followed by Dr Powell. "I have sworn an oath," Pearson had said to her, "to redress the injuries for which he (her brother) was in part suffering." No wonder she was plunged into a sea of bewilderment; so much was she distracted, that it was a difficult thing at first to comprehend the remarks of the gentleman by her side. It was not long, however, before she was won from her disquiet. Langton's countenance was animated and frank, and there was so true a spirit of politeness in his attentions, that she acquitted herself far more to her satisfaction than she hoped. An hour before, and Mary Napier would have said, it would be impossible for her to have felt even tolerable composure in Langton's presence; but that time had scarcely elapsed, and now she not only listened with marked attention and interest, but felt so perfectly at her ease, that she could even venture to question him relative to a subject of much personal concern. Langton had made some passing remark in reference to climate, when she said :—

"You are from India, I understand. Nay, why should I question you by implication," she remarked, with an ingenuous blush: "you returned, did not you, with a relative of ours? Walter Curran, poor fellow! his was a sad fate."

"His had been a life of hardship and trial, Miss Napier," said Mr Langton, with a grave, pained expression of countenance: "for many years he struggled against adverse fortune. He was an active and enterprising officer, yet he was unfortunate in an affair of consequence. Some blamed him, but those who knew things better, acquitted him of error. However, he all but lost his life in the rashest attempt ever conceived to retrieve the casualty to which I have alluded. Before he was restored to health, he received intelligence which induced him to embark for this country; on the long passage, I found him my best companion. He looked forward to happiness: alas, had he lived, how delusive would have been his anticipations;" and Langton, for the first time in Mary's society, sank into that fit of brooding melancholy, which affected him occasionally.

Mary Napier, not noticing this change in her companion, observed:—"Of course, he was most

interested in the happiness of his poor mother and sister ; had he known the worst, his sorrow would have been great."

"It would, Miss Napier," answered Mr Langton, very gravely.

"What kind of person was he?" the young lady timidly added.

A peculiar smile flitted around Langton's mouth ; it may have been that he suspected what was passing in her mind ; and he said :—

"The world accounted him a well-looking man, of gay and generous disposition :—" he paused, attracted by a remark from Colonel Neville.

"It is asserted that your former protégé, Pearson, was among the gang that attacked you the other night, Charles."

"I will stake my honour, ay, my life, on his honesty and integrity," answered Napier, warmly. Colonel Neville smiled ; he quite pitied his friend's delusion, and seemed to express as much in his glance as he pledged Mr Langton in a glass of champagne.

Napier, during this passing meal, looked dissatisfied and uneasy ; he could not dissemble.

The dining-room door had scarcely closed, when,

apologizing to Napier and Dr Powell, Colonel Neville took Langton away with him to the balcony.

"I cannot sit in suspense any longer, Mr Langton," he said. "I had no opportunity this morning to speak to you on the subject so near my heart; but do, pray, tell me now, if you have obtained an insight into my son's affairs, and if you think there is hope that my overtures would be favourably entertained?" From this remark of Colonel Neville's, it will be seen that he placed much reliance on the judgment of the singular and interesting individual who had so suddenly appeared in the neighbourhood, and had sought to implicate himself in the destinies of the Napier and Neville families.

In reply to Colonel Neville's question, Langton said, in a serious, reflective manner :—

"Latterly, I have been much in your son's society, and have done my best to ingratiate myself with him, to enable me to advance your project. I observe a feverish yearning for excitement; a desire at all cost for amusement, regardless of the awkward predicaments which result from his contempt of social law. One day I had an opportunity of say-

ing a few words to him, in reference to the value of money and its uses, when he spoke of being hard pressed for cash ; he received my guarded remarks with good grace, but, at the same hour, concluded a bill transaction with that harpy of the law here just now, at a heavy discount, and glanced at me, as if to say : ‘ You see how I estimate your advice.’ ” After a slight pause, Mr Langton further said :—

“ The point which occurs to me as the most remarkable, is Wilton’s authority over him. They are certainly not on friendly terms, yet Wilton exercises a tyrannical influence over his actions : I could almost venture to say, his thoughts. It surprises me ; for if they have gone hand in hand in practices which are not commendable, they would stand at least on equal terms ; and, I should have thought the younger man, from the traits of disposition he exhibits, a most unlikely person to submit to so arbitrary a power being exercised over him, by one who professedly stands his familiar friend.”

“ He never had any strength of mind,” said the father sadly,—“ he is a mere machine, ready set to the use of the crafty and designing, despite the impetuosity and ill-governed nature of his passions.

I understand Wilton. I see how he is working—he binds my son to him to advance his own vile schemes.” The old man shuddered as his thoughts reverted to Wilton’s stern threat and declaration, that Ellen should be his. “My own sweet child,” he muttered, “is such a fate reserved for thee?”

“Let us hope for the best,” remarked Mr Langton, in a voice of deep feeling.—“Will you be surprised, when I tell you, that with all my apparent calmness, my feelings are scarcely less lacerated than your own. This I say in confidence; and I further add, that I am here to unravel a mystery which assumes a dark and startling character, and which affects me as closely as it does those with whom I have held familiar intercourse to-day. Facts which I have elicited bid me watch Wilton closely. In progress of time, I hope to have it in my power to shield the innocent and suffering from his machinations.”

Colonel Neville had gazed earnestly on his companion at the commencement of his remarks; and he now said eagerly, “Your words are strange, yet they breathe the essence of sincerity. In God’s name, who are you?—You quite bewilder me.”

“I am, as you will find me, an earnest and an

honest friend," was the answer, delivered in a clear, emphatic manner, "warmly interested in your welfare. Do not press me farther."

Colonel Neville paused in his walk, for he and his friend had been traversing the balcony during their brief conference, and, taking his companion's arm, he said, "You have sadly perplexed me. Far be it from me, however, to seek to know more than you are disposed to reveal. I will rely upon you—and hope—yes, hope"—and a tear glistened in the speaker's eye—"it is the last pulse that throbs in a father's heart—I have often thought it extinct—but it burns up again, though flickering and tremulous." He said no more; and after he had regained composure he returned to the dining-room with his guest.

There was a long conference this afternoon between Napier and Langton. If the former had entertained a doubt of his companion's sincerity, it was quite banished through the feeling manner Langton displayed. Napier, however, could not refrain from delicately expressing his surprise, that a stranger, like Langton, to the country and neighbourhood, should be so well acquainted with

facts which were of so much moment and concern to his family.

Langton observed, independently of his assurance in the morning, that he was the dear friend of Walter Curran. He further confessed to Napier that he had been his only adviser for many years, and that he quite knew the position in which his friend stood in reference to his family connexion ; therefore he considered he could not better testify his sense of his friend's worth than by stepping forward, to fulfil, if possible, Walter Curran's often expressed desire that he should be placed in a position to prove to his English relations that his heart was not turned from them.

" Regard me then," said Mr Langton, " as the executor of my friend's dear wishes. Trust in me, as you would in him, presuming you had faith in his good intentions. Permit me to go forward hand and heart with you. Let me join you in the discovery of that unfortunate being, the sister of my friend ; that girl whom he, with a manly tenderness and with the pride of a brother's love, yearned to clasp to his heart." He then added, " In reference to your brother, that which has been revealed to me to-day proves he has been snared by a man

of vicious character. Of Wilton I know more than he conceives ; single-handed, you cannot cope with him, for his intellect is as able as his heart is evil ; together we may confound him."

* * * *

Napier's carriage being in readiness, Dr Powell came forward to advise his patient's return to Vallis. His face brightened from pure delight as he saw so good an understanding existing between Napier and him in whom he seemed to take a parental interest. In reply to a question of Napier's, he said gaily, " If he does not go by his own free-will, I will bring him by force." Napier was satisfied ; but, as the carriage proceeded down the avenue, Mr Langton turned to his companion, and remarked very gravely, " Not yet !—not yet !—I cannot trust my own heart."

CHAPTER XII.

NAPIER was much dissatisfied on account of the reserve manifested by Pearson. Twice by messenger had he signified his wish that Pearson should visit him at Vallis, but his courtesy was unsuccessful. Excuses were returned ; and Napier, at last, was inclined to believe that the rumour which implicated Pearson in the assault upon himself was the cause of his apparent churlishness.

Napier was grieved that a report of so false a character should have arisen, and as he could not make it the matter of a written communication, he resolved on visiting Pearson in person, to endeavour to do away with the annoyance he conceived he experienced.

On reaching Farmer Willis's house, Pearson's temporary abode, and which was within the boundary of the Vallis estates, Napier found the indi-

vidual he sought sitting in the room which had been set apart for him, instructing a fine intelligent lad of some ten or twelve years of age in the art of tying flies for fishing.

Pearson was civil, no more ; accounting, not apologizing, for keeping on his hat, which was of dark felt with slouched brim, by saying it secured a bandage he was compelled to use on account of an injury he had sustained.

Napier observed Pearson's abruptness, but took slight account of it; he remembered the service the latter had rendered him, and he knew that under that strange exterior beat an honest heart; therefore he at once expressed his sense of Pearson's services, and, in doing so, did not hesitate to condemn in severe terms the uncharitable inferences deduced from his presence on the evening of the affray; but at the same time, in a more guarded manner, touched upon the singularity of Pearson's presence at that hour in so secluded a neighbourhood.

In reply, Pearson said with seeming indifference, and in a rough voice :—

“All that was singular in my conduct originates from the interpretation men's fancies are pleased to render of a really very matter-of-fact piece of

business or behaviour. Through your kindness, Mr Napier, I have tarried in this neighbourhood and enjoyed an old familiar amusement; one that takes me sometimes far a-field, and might introduce me to strange sights, and strange companions. From the gossip of some, suspicion of others, and exercise of my own eyes, I became aware of what was going on in the old widow's cottage; and as I never hesitate in doing my best to counteract the workings of barefaced villany, I strove to shield a pretty, but very weak young lady, from the machinations of a profligate individual of whom I knew something. I overtaxed my own powers, as you are aware, and, but for you, should perhaps have lost my life: so the case stands; but as to there being a mystery in my conduct, I must say there seem no grounds for it to me."

Napier remarked, as Pearson concluded this explanation:—

"Well, you seem resolved to make a commonplace matter of an action that merits my warmest acknowledgment. I fear, as the fishing season is over, that we shall shortly lose you, and thus be deprived of a watchful eye; for I regard you, Mr Pearson, almost in the light of a faithful sentinel

over Vallis interests, though you are determined to convince me that simple accident thrusts you forward in so conspicuous a manner before us. Are you as enthusiastic in the field as by the river?"

"Yes, Mr Napier," was the answer; "all sports are alike engrossing. I journey far and wide to gratify this passion. As you surmise, I shall leave this neighbourhood shortly, and I shall do so with regret."

"Then I will give orders to our keepers to advance your amusements in September," remarked Napier. "Birds are generally plentiful here; no one will cross your path on the Vallis domain, and as Willis knows the favourite haunts of the game, you may have sport enough, if you have no better occupation."

"I thank you sincerely for this token of generous confidence," was the reply, and a peculiar expression flitted about Pearson's mouth, as he observed significantly, "that the preserves would not suffer through his devotion to them, as he should serve as a scarecrow to all poachers, and thus be, as Mr Napier had intimated, still a sentinel over Vallis interests."

There was a tremulous earnestness in this strange

man's voice, as he made this last remark, that caused Napier to think of his sister's allusion to him; and then, as his eye rested on the muscular and finely proportioned form which the coarse, ill-made fustian dress could not conceal, he felt an interest apart from former feeling in him. As he extended his hand when about to leave the room, he said candidly :—

“ You are an enigma I should like to decipher ! Farewell, Mr Pearson ; I feel we shall meet again, and until then, may health and happiness be with you.”

On Napier's return to Vallis House, he found a letter bearing a foreign post-mark had arrived. He eagerly perused its contents. It was from Seville, from the relatives of his aunt Curran's husband, in reply to a missive he had addressed to them, seeking for more explicit information relative to the flight of his cousin Inez. He found that this unfortunate girl had eloped from Seville with an Englishman some months previously, and that Napier's informant believed they had fled to France. One letter had been received from her, and it appeared that the person who had estranged her from propriety was either dead, or that he had deserted

her, for she spoke of having endured great sorrow, and likewise persecution from others, whilst he in whom she had placed implicit confidence had left her without the slightest explanation of his conduct. Still it seemed she could not believe that he had thus cruelly abandoned her in so unprotected a situation, but that some sad calamity must have overtaken him, of the nature of which she was in ignorance. It was useless for her friends to attempt to coerce her in her resolve, she said ; she was determined to penetrate to the heart of the mystery which hung over his conduct, and if she found that she had been betrayed, her interest in life would end.

The next paragraph rather puzzled Napier. A gentleman of the name of Langton had visited Seville, and had evinced the most acute sorrow and concern at the elopement of Inez ; afterwards producing a will, purporting to be the last behests of Walter Curran. Mr Langton was appointed sole executor ; upon which authority he had placed the affairs of his friend's departed parents in due order, disbursing some small debts from his own purse, and pensioning two attached domestics of the Curran family with generous liberality.

"It is strange," said Napier, "that Langton did not mention his visit to Seville to me." He closed the letter, and resolved to seek Langton, and place the communication in his hands, trusting, by that act of confidence, to break through the reserve this individual shrouded himself under. Circumstances, however, combined to delay the execution of his purpose, and, when he at last repaired to S. bent on this errand, he was annoyed to find that Mr Langton was absent, having been called away to London on business of importance.

CHAPTER XIII.

I MUST now beg the reader to return with me to Mowbray. The day prior to Charles Napier's visit to Pearson, Ellen Neville received a note by messenger from Wyke, (a small village some three or four miles from Mowbray,) which caused her much surprise and concern. It was with difficulty Ellen concealed the nature of the communication from her father; for so suspicious had he become, —though dreading the result of inquiry—that no messenger arrived, no day passed, but he sought information about what was going on; evincing an irritability and nervousness in reference to the most trivial matter, most trying to those placed in close connexion with him. Not until this afternoon could Ellen fulfil the wishes of her unknown correspondent. Colonel Neville had gone on a visit to an acquaintance in the neighbourhood, and

Ellen availed herself of his absence to effect her wishes.

I have said that the note Ellen had received caused her surprise and concern, nor were these feelings allayed as she again perused it on her road to Wyke. The request was singular and strange; the signature was "Inez" only, and the writer referred to a former meeting, a friendly warning, which should be made more explicit, if death spared its victim until Miss Neville's arrival. By quick riding, Ellen soon reached Wyke, and, as her servant knew the place well, he took her direct to the cottage she wished to visit. As Ellen entered the house, a respectable female came forward and said :—

" You are come to see my lodger, Miss Neville, she has been looking out very anxiously for you."

" I am sorry I could not comply with her wishes sooner," observed Ellen; " and now, pray, tell me the name of your lodger: she must be a stranger to me."

" Not so much so as you now think, Miss Neville," answered the woman, significantly: " at least, one who had once a home at Mowbray keeps a sharp watch upon her. Step here, my lady, for a moment ;" and the mistress of the cottage pointed through a small casement that looked into a lane

at the back of the place, and said, "Do you not know that individual?" Ellen's eye followed the direction pointed out, and saw a man stalking carelessly on, whose figure she thought not unfamiliar to her: he turned and glanced towards the house, and the face of Wilton was before her.

For a short period Ellen Neville seemed bewildered; but rallying, she turned away, and observed, "I do not understand this: but pray give me some account of this poor invalid."

"I have not much to tell," was the answer. "Had I liked, I could have made a good harvest; but *he* mistook me. I was born of honest parents, and my actions shall be honest: the wages of sin buy but a bad meal."

"A just remark," observed Ellen, quietly; "money should be honestly gained to be of sterling worth. Now, pray tell me what you know of the person I am come to visit."

"All I know is this, Miss Neville," was the reply; "that somewhere about six weeks ago, my husband was returning from S—— with his horse and cart early in the morning; he had stopped at brother's House the night, and left S—— at sunrise. And it was about four o'clock, darkish, he

says, when he saw a young woman hurrying along the road by Stratton Cross—You know Stratton Cross, ma'm, I 'spose?" Ellen assented,—“and when he came up with her, she looked scared and frightened like; and, he says, he never saw any thing like the poor creature's face—it was all over a look of horror. My husband is a kind man, and he was just a-going to speak to her, when she came to his side, and, clasping her hands, prayed of him to let her get into the cart; for she was very tired, and faint, and could not walk farther. Husband was glad to do her service, for she was so feeble and humble: with all that, he sticks to it, she was more like a lady born than they who wouldn't demean themselves to be seen in her company.

“Well, he puts her into the cart, and he made her as comfortable as possible, and the poor thing fell into a sleep; and he didn't like to wake her to ask where she was a-going, so he drove straight home here, and begged me to take her in, and be kind to her. I think her and husband had some talk on the road; but he declares he never said a word to her: but it does seem odd, 'cause, although he is kind-hearted, he's rather grave and serious since we lost our two, about the age of this one; and I

never saw him take up with anybody before. Bless you, Miss, he waits upon her just like a servant; and more kindly like, I take it, than most would, 'cause she's poor. Well, Miss, I did as husband wished. She behaved very well; in fact I was all out about her: a lady she was, and she was so still and grave. She wanted to pay for her board and lodging, but husband would n't hear of nothing of the kind; and she staid up in her little room, never moving out but for a few minutes at night, with husband. She talked to him, I know, for he was often off on her business.

"Well, things went on like this for a month, when one day she went out into the lane with me to have a short walk—for husband was from home—when that man you saw just now came upon us. She fainted away dead. I just managed to get her back when *he* came in too. Just then husband reached home; *he* sneaked away; you may depend upon it. Since that she has took to her bed; she's got a low fever; she has not left her room since, and I fancy that she is not long for this world. She is one who has seen better days, or I much mistake, Miss Neville."

Ellen's countenance expressed a deep concern, a truly feminine sympathy; she made no allusion to

the facts revealed ; but requested the kind-hearted woman to inform the invalid of her arrival, and to ask if she was well enough to see her. In a few minutes, Mrs Mitchell returned, saying, if Miss Neville would follow her, she would show her to the strange lady's room. Ellen ascended a narrow stair, and was admitted into a small apartment, wherein lay the object of her visit.

Though the cheek was wan and attenuated, and the face shrouded by an expression of the deepest melancholy, the countenance which met Ellen's view was as interesting and lovely as nature ever created. An air of refinement and elegance was around and about her ; none could have gazed upon her, without feeling the purest sympathies of their nature powerfully excited. She was evidently a rarely endowed, as well as suffering woman ; and a young and gentle being, with an expression of modesty in her pensive attitude which it is impossible to describe. She was reclining on her bed supported with pillows : Yes ! there she lay, the stranger, the alien ; once a mother's pride, a brother's hope, a lover's idol : but now how changed was her position ! She personified the expression of heart-suffering. Soft, dark, silky

tresses fell carelessly over the neck and bosom ; her eyes were indeed a study, so large, so expressive, so blue, and revealing such a feeling of misery, that the nerves thrilled, and the heart throbbed at the spectacle ; it appeared as if the *eye* of the soul was gazing longingly through those dark orbs, on *hope* sinking in the horizon.

The poor invalid gazed upon her visiter with an eye of earnest interest, and pressed the hand which was in hers to her lips, with much emotion ; then, before she spoke, she folded carefully an old and crumpled letter that was open before her, and as she placed it amongst some others that were by her, there was a slight flush upon the cheek, and a wistful look upon them, that insinuated their preciousness ; and they were precious, for they chronicled the devotion of one much loved, but now lost to her.

This task nervously performed, she turned to Ellen, and said, in a low, sweet voice, though feeble :—

“ Will you sit by me, Miss Neville ;” and she pointed to a chair near : “ As close as you can, for my voice has lost its power, and my physical strength is slight.”

"I hope you are not offended at a stranger taking the liberty, which I have taken with you, Miss Neville. No, no! by that eye of kindness, I see you are not; but do you not remember me? Have you, in so short a period, forgotten her who crossed your path on the hillside, and spoke to you of impending danger? I presume I must be changed; trouble, and fear, and sorrow, wearing on the heart, chase even the likeness of yesterday from the countenance."

"Oh! can you be the same," cried Ellen, feelingly: "You are indeed altered, yet I recognise you now, and, believe me, how sorry I am to see that sickness has smitten you so sorely. You must be removed; I must arrange things more comfortably for you; I do not think you will object to my being your nurse, will you?" and Ellen paused, as if to obtain a promise of trust in her.

The crushed spirit of the invalid seemed soothed by such obvious sympathy. "You are most generous and kind," she said in a voice of grateful pathos; "but a cruel fate deters me from moving beyond the boundary of this little room."—She paused a while, but did not withdraw her gaze from

Ellen's face ; and, again speaking with deep emotion, she added : " And *you* would be my nurse ! Hear it, harsh world ! and let the young inexperienced heart teach you a rich lesson. You would protect me,—a wanderer,—a stranger ; for all you know, a thing of shame and guilt. Miss Neville, I, who feel that the promise of earthly happiness is dead within me, who have now but a solace left which is not of this world,—feel, even humble as my feelings are, rebuked by such sweet humility ;" and she pressed a quivering lip to the hand she still held.

Ellen Neville leant forward as these mournful words fell, and said, in a voice hardly above a whisper : " Confide in me as in a sister ; tell me the cause of this seeming mystery and trouble. I am a woman, and can feel for the distressed ; and if one of your own sex can aid you, you may freely command my services."

The sufferer answered : " I had resolved never to breathe to human ear the nature of my sorrows, or to betray the source whence they spring ; but sympathy such as you manifest causes my heart to revive. Your voice recalls me to the world ; and

that I may appear worthy of your friendship, I will take a retrospect of sorrows,—a retrospect of happiness, and then say if human will can mitigate my distress.”

The invalid passed her hand across her brow and continued :—

“ Miss Neville, for three months I have been in this neighbourhood, therefore know your character, and am aware that you can raise emotion above self, and yield hope and consolation to your father, who, but for you, would sink from utter despair. Yes, Miss Neville, you are well known to me, and you will regard me with even greater surprise than now, when I tell you that in the spring of my happiness, as in the depths of my misery, your name has been alike familiar to me.” She paused as if to collect her thoughts, and then said :—

“ I will now comply with your request, and reveal my history to you, and my reason for warning you the other day against a danger to yourself. At present I will conceal my name from you, and will only tell you, that I am an Englishwoman, born of English parents, though educated in a foreign country. My family held a position in society, and

was honoured and respected. See to what I am reduced." She glanced around her meagre apartments with a countenance expressive of concern and grief. "I have said I was educated in a foreign country, and it was never well explained to me why my family settled abroad, nor the reason of an estrangement which existed between my mother and her relations ; but from a chance word dropped occasionally, I knew that her family moved in the higher circles of English society, and were people of repute and social consequence. Of my father I cannot say much ; his duties drew him often for long periods from home. He was an officer in the army of Spain, and fell in battle when I was fourteen ; thus my knowledge of him is limited. But of my mother, Miss Neville, I retain an earnest heart-engrossing thought and remembrance. I had one brother, a noble and a gallant boy, who grew into a brave and enterprising soldier. He is gone from me—I am alone ; but it is well he is no more," she said mournfully, and the swell of her bosom proved she strove hard to suppress emotion ; "for, oh ! it would be death to me for him to know that she, for whom he hoped so much, would be ever thus stricken, thus destitute."

After a short pause, the invalid continued :—

“ At my father’s decease my mother’s life was despaired of : when she rallied I became the concern and interest of her life. My brother had prospered rarely. He had won honour in many engagements ; his name stood high amongst his fellow-soldiers. He was my mother’s pride—I was her care, and she decided on living on in Spain, for her health was delicate, and she had a few select acquaintances around her. Oh ! she was *so* loved, Miss Neville, by all who knew her : though living in a country where strangers were viewed suspiciously, she won the respect of those around her through her charitable acts ; and the blessings of the poor followed her footsteps. My mother was prevailed upon to part with me for a time, as I was solicited to visit my father’s relatives at Seville. Pleasure in my happy ignorance was without alloy. I was very young—a child in the world’s ways, and those who loved me called me beautiful.

“ After a short period my friends took me, during the carnival, to witness a bull-fight. I had heard of this exhibition, and thought as others think, who had not been eye-witnesses of the scene, that it must be a novel and an interesting spectacle ; but I was bit-

terly deceived. At once my whole being recoiled, —thought, sensation, impulse, sickened. I turned away from a scene I felt sufficient to brutalize a people ; and for the first time sighed for home, to be once more in the free air of my native village. I implored my friends to take me away, but they answered, I should soon familiarize myself with it, and strove to laugh away my scruples. I was pained and hurt, and resolved not to look upon a spectacle so abhorrent to humanity. I turned from the scene, and on casting my eyes on a tier above, I perceived a gentleman of fashionable exterior steadily regarding me ; his gaze was not bold but of a startled, searching character.

“ Suddenly shrieks burst upon my ear, and all around was wild confusion. Before I had time to think or act, I saw the flaming nostrils of the enraged bull close, as I thought, before me. He had cleared the barrier, and as my party occupied a low tier, he was rushing upon us. My companions huddled together at the farthest part of the row ; but I could not move—I seemed paralyzed. The sounds of fear and terrified exclamations were all that I could comprehend. At the moment I felt

the breath of the infuriated monster on my cheek, a strong, determined grasp lifted me off my seat, and I was held in the arms of some courageous person who had risked his life to save me. I turned half dead with fright ; but before I had time to speak, a voice whispered in imperfect Spanish, ' Be still, I pray you, or we shall both be sacrificed.' I opened my eyes, and then I perceived the danger. The stranger could not move ; the bull was directly in his path : nor could he vault the tiers, for I encumbered him ; so he stood there,—firm and resolute. On the bull came nearer and nearer ; many hovered behind the animal, and the matadors were striving to strike him from the side, but not one would step between us and apparent destruction. The terrible monster lowered his horns preparatory to a rush ; a cry of horror was raised. One matador more daring than the rest, rushed in, and made a slight diversion ; but his foot slipped, and he lay at the mercy of the bull. One bound, and the animal was upon him, when the stranger who still held me stooped quickly, plucked the sword, with which the fallen matador was armed, from his hand, and plunged the weapon to the hilt between the shoulders of the animal.

The bull reeled forward, tottered, then fell with a crash among the seats, and a prolonged and repeated shout rang through the arena. Before I had disengaged myself from the grasp the stranger held me with, he whispered, 'Sweet lady, in saving you I feel the purest happiness I have ever known,' and then he placed me on a seat. I raised my eyes in gratitude and met his gaze. His brow was flushed, and the muscles of his countenance worked spasmodically as I gazed timidly upon him. I strove to utter my gratitude, when, to my horror, his lips were covered with blood. He was obliged to lean against the bench for support a moment; his head sunk upon his bosom, and he fainted."

It was some minutes before the invalid could proceed with her tale. Ellen Neville was greatly moved; there was something so touchingly earnest, blended with the tone of tenderness, as she referred to the preserver of her life, that Ellen's own heart sympathized with her. A deep sigh escaped from the bosom of the invalid as she resumed her tale.

"You may conceive my sorrow and alarm; I was wild with grief; I was a young untutored thing, and now I wonder at my audacity. His head

was pillowed on my shoulder; though a crowd gathered around, I saw it not; but my hand was employed in wiping away the blood that oozed from his lips, and my tears mingled with the crimson fluid. Friends whispered to me, but I seemed not to comprehend them. I was attracted to the stranger by an irresistible influence. Although I had never seen him until this hour, we seemed to have been dear friends for years; I was a girl no longer, no longer the dreaming, fanciful child I had been; I was at once transformed into a woman, and new emotions were within my soul.

“My deliverer had ruptured a blood-vessel; he was removed to the house of my relative. In the morning, my friends came early to inform me the stranger had passed a good night: this I knew well; my first inquiry at the break of day had been for him. In less than a week the invalid was removed to the drawing-room; he inquired for me, and I was permitted to see him. Throughout the day I did not leave his side—we were together; to me he seemed richly endowed, mentally and physically. He rapidly regained his health, which he would ascribe to my care and watchfulness; but

now we were to separate,—there was no longer a reason for his residence beneath the roof that sheltered me, and he quitted it for his hotel. Still we were much together: he was rarely from my side—he learnt my history. I wondered then, but do not now, that it should have affected him. I had no secrets from him, for I loved him. We were, too, so much like each other, the similarity of feature struck many as peculiar, and as I perceived it, I thought it a joyous thing that my features should live in his countenance, and his image appear in mine. Yes, I loved him, loved with the devotion of the woman whose heart for the first time experiences the entrancing passion. His love became as necessary to my existence as the dews of heaven to the spring flower; but, alas! Miss Neville, the step is short between joy and sorrow, it is our lot to be made aware of the presence of unhappiness when it is least expected. A letter reached me from my mother requesting me to return to her with as little delay as possible, as sickness had suddenly seized upon her. My mind was sadly apprehensive of evil, and I decided on immediately starting to fulfil her injunctions.

“ Seeking my friends to disclose my intentions, I found they too had been addressed on the same subject, and had been commissioned to perform the melancholy necessity of apprizing me of a terrible disaster that had befallen my high-hearted and noble brother. He lay, so it was reported, at an extreme post of our Indian territory mortally wounded. You may conceive my affliction. I hastily arranged my plans, and made *him* aware of the necessity for my immediate departure. He was keenly affected at my melancholy intelligence, and promised to follow me on the ensuing week. I reached my home; my poor mother was quite heart-broken; she lingered with me but ten days from the date of my return to her.” The speaker paused; when the swell of emotion had partly subsided, she continued: “ I will pass over my misery, my tears; my many hours of anguish are known only to God and my own heart. . . . Again we met; the spell was as before; indeed I clung more closely to him. He was all to me; I had no one to look to but him. No sister, no brother now; no parent to check, to school, to influence young impulse, and he stood by me in the light of all; he requited my trust then.


Oh, Miss Neville, when in utter despair it is hard to take a retrospect of happiness. May you never know how long it is to watch out the hours of day and night when darkness is within, and the morrow awakens memory to fresh feeling, only to encircle heart and reason in a dark despair."

"Do not, do not, I pray you, harass your feelings thus," cried Ellen Neville with uneven voice. "I feel your trials have been heavy; but remember how much is promised to us, if we bear our allotted burdens with humility and resignation. There is no state so lowly and destitute but has the promise of divine protection. Look up and solicit it, and it will shed its healing dews around you, and thus render your present position more endurable."

"True, Miss Neville, true," was the reply in a low, tremulous voice; "reason acknowledges the virtue of your reasoning. To continue my tale: The time had come when my relatives, for I had been removed to Seville, began to speak openly in reference to my lover's intentions; 'had he a desire to make me his wife; if so, he was to state his views, if not, our interviews should cease.' I told *him* this, and with perfect confidence in his love

asked him what I was to do. He hesitated for a while ; my jealous heart became alarmed, and tears burst into my eyes, when he chided me for my mistrust ; and, seating himself by me, revealed his own position. He had not proceeded far in his explanation before I was all amazement, now bewildered, then overjoyed. His name had been an assumed one ; he was my own cousin, son of my mother's brother. He wished to make me his wife, but could not brook the delay to which he should be subjected, if he returned to England to relate his position. I could not be left behind by him, nor could I accompany him unless he had a lawful claim over me.

“For a time I pleaded delay, and the necessity of communicating with his parent ; he feared his father's interference, he dreaded procrastination. My friends grew authoritative, placed a watch over me, and strove to effect a union between me and a comparative stranger. The result was, we eluded the vigilance of my guardians, eloped from Seville, repaired to G——, and were privately married. My husband's health was not good ; we travelled slowly, nor did I wish to hasten : he was by me, it was all I could desire.



After a time we reached France ; Paris was at its gayest. My husband secured a delightful retreat, as we resolved not to appear in public, and bore feigned names. I yielded all such points to his judgment ; I cared for nothing but his society.

“ One afternoon, about a fortnight after our arrival, we were taking a stroll in the country, for we resided in the suburbs of the city, when two gentlemen passed us, but immediately returned and saluted my husband. He seemed annoyed, and, I thought, averse to their company, which I think they perceived, for one of them said, ‘ Well, we will not obtrude now, but you must promise to meet us at our lodgings to-morrow ; we are at our old quarters.’ My husband’s face flushed ; he promised to visit them, but evidently against his inclination. As these individuals rode away, I questioned him about them, ‘ They were his countrymen,—were they friends ? ’ ‘ Yes, Inez,’ he answered with a caustic smile, ‘ they swear that they are dear friends of mine, whilst I,—but no matter, love ; the tall man is a Mr Neville—that calm, self-sufficient, clever-looking person who spoke to me, a Mr Wilton.’ ”

Ellen Neville gave a wild and terrified start ;

her eyes had been fixed on the speaker's face in deep attention, and as her brother's name fell from the invalid's lips, she too fully conceived that there was much shame and suffering, in which *he* would prominently figure, still to be revealed. She had risen from her seat, and stood with lips tightly compressed, her hand upon her bosom, as if to still an almost overpowering emotion, as she cried in frightened accents: "What! did you say my brother? Merciful Heaven, who are you?" and she gazed upon the sufferer as if more than life depended on her reply. The invalid bent her dark blue eye, now lighted with a graceful pride and sensibility, on Ellen's agitated face, and answered:—

"The time is come for me to raise the veil which cruel events has compelled me to use, to shield from vulgar eyes the nature of my position. Do not discredit the avowal now made. I am Inez Napier—once Inez Curran—the deserted wife of Henry Napier."

Ellen Neville gazed on the afflicted being before her, but at last, starting as if affrighted at her own thoughts, she cried:—

"Oh! this is too terrible. For this I was wholly unprepared—God strengthen me for the trial." Then, sinking on her knees, she added in a voice of supplication, "Inez, forgive us—alas! I know not what to say; thought at such a moment is very fearful."

Inez Napier, as if she felt it necessary to pursue the task she had imposed upon herself, then said:—

"I must proceed with my history; I can speak more plainly now. I have yet much to say, all, in fact, of direct interest to you."

"Oh no, say not so," cried Ellen, feelingly; and, rousing herself, she added, "Dear Inez, let the rest of your sad tale, for sad I know it must be, be told to a sincere friend. I will indeed listen to you in the light of this dear connexion; and let me lay my aching head upon your pillow, and testify by my tears my new-found love for you, and how truly and deeply I mourn for you."

"Sweet one," said Inez, in a low quivering voice, "I do indeed now mourn that I should have to say one word that must cast a gloom on your pure heart; whose noble faith in a stranger's word has cast down the barrier which I feared worldly mis-

trust might have raised between us, and whose sympathy yields me a comfort I had never thought to realize again. Tell me, how comes it you so readily believe my assertions."

"I have heard a rumour of your misfortunes, and of your family. I implicitly believe you; and now, Inez, as to a dear friend, tell me what has yet to be revealed."

"Since you wish it, I will do so, and then touch upon the facts that affect you," remarked Inez, gravely. "The second day after our meeting the gentlemen I have mentioned, my husband left me to visit them; he did not return until long after midnight. I was alarmed at his absence, and remained sitting up for him, which annoyed him, it seemed, and I concealed my uneasiness. His face was flushed; his manner excited and irritable. From this period, his absence was frequent; still his affection for me was in no degree diminished. One night, after I had retired to rest, I detected voices in the drawing-room. I was alarmed at so unusual a circumstance, and left my bed to ascertain the reason, and through a crevice in the door, which stood partly open, I saw Henry sitting at a

table, engaged at cards with the individuals he had met when walking with me. I retraced my steps, and from that hour a palpable impression of mistrust of my husband's sincerity entered my mind. I felt my influence was lessening. I could not conceal from myself the fact, that two men of whom he had spoken slightly, possessed the authority to draw my husband from me, and that he was weak enough to descend to practices which I thought he despised.

"Hours seemed to pass before he came to his room. I cannot say if he had been a loser, but his appearance was strange; I never saw him wear the face before which met my view that night. There was an expression of wild restlessness about it, and the brow contracted into an angry frown as he examined a die. 'I will have this tested,' said he sternly, 'and if it be as I suspect

I heard no more, but I had heard enough to cause me deep uneasiness; my eyes closed, I felt quite faint; he came to my side, and murmured as he leant over me, 'Dear one, rest in your happy slumber; oh, how I envy you your calmness!' I could have sprung up and hung upon his neck in gratitude, but I feared he would think I had been watching

him, and he would be unhappy. We were not so happy from this time. At periods, Henry was moody and abstracted. He again left me for the evening, nor did he return until quite daylight; and on the following night, when he signified his intention of going out again for a few hours, I could contain my feelings no longer, and, with my arms around him, I made him conscious of my fears, and succeeded in obtaining a promise to leave Paris at once; for I must confess I believed his English friends were the cause, in some way, of his strange conduct and significant uneasiness.

“ Within three days our arrangements were completed, and we left for England. We reached London without an incident of moment occurring. Henry took private lodgings, resolving to remain some short time in that capital to arrange his plans. I thought he ought at once to have communicated with his friends, but as he was jealous of my interference in his affairs, I did my best to still the disquietude of my mind. Days passed; a morbid, apathetic feeling possessed the faculties of my generous, high spirited husband. I had a fresh source of anxiety to combat now, as I began to fear he regretted the hasty step he had taken in making me his wife.

One night he left me, and he was strangely affected when I bade him protect himself from the cold. He never returned—I had watched through the weary hours till morning; then I received this note," and the speaker drew one from amongst a parcel that lay by her, and gave it to Ellen, who read as follows:—

"DEAREST INEZ,—A sudden and unlooked for calamity has befallen me. Last night, I was tempted to try my fortune at a gaming table. The police magistrates had obtained information, I presume, of the character of the house to which I had repaired. A party of police officers entered, and attempted to take me and my companions into custody. We resisted, and I fear fatally to him who strove to make me his prisoner. We cannot now accomplish the object I had in view. I have left for Paris; I could not delay a moment, not even to return to you; had I followed the dictates of feeling, I should have been captured. Wilton knows all; he will convey you safely to me, he understands our connexion. Trust implicitly to him, but for his friendship, I should not have been

able to evade the capture which would have disgraced my name, deprived me of liberty, if not have placed my life in jeopardy. &c., &c.

“ HENRY NAPIER.”

“ After a night of suspense and mental uneasiness,” pursued Inez, when this note was silently returned to her by Ellen Neville, “ that was the intelligence I received. You may suppose the state to which I was reduced ; still, his word was law to me ; I made hasty preparations to obey his wishes, and, as I concluded, Mr Wilton waited upon me. I arranged to leave with him on the following morning ; and as my desire was to join my husband as soon as possible, we scarcely rested until we reached Paris. I entreated him to seek my husband and inform him of my arrival. This he promised to do, and left me with protestations of respect and service. I felt grateful to him, his kindness had been extreme, and his conduct accorded with the dictates of politeness and friendly regard.

“ I did not see him again that day, but, in the morning, a note came from him saying he could gain no intelligence of my husband ; that he pre-

sumed he had not made the despatch we had. I was not exactly alarmed, but my mind was restless and uneasy. I sent for Mr Wilton on the following day. He informed me that he had not the slightest knowledge on this head; but evincing much sympathy for my situation, reasoned so long and well, that I felt confident he was anxious to serve me. Days passed; I could gain no intelligence of my husband; my money was gone, and I was compelled to apply to Mr Wilton; my fears began to assume a more defined character. I thought some calamity or accident had befallen him for whom I looked so anxiously. Mr Wilton now took upon himself the management of my affairs; he more than once prevailed on me to leave my seclusion in his company. Those few who remembered me when I lived there in close retirement with my husband, insinuated reports derogatory to my character; of course there were people to tell me what was said, and thus, more bitterly than ever, did I now experience the effect of my husband's indiscretion.

“ At first, I thought my own conscious rectitude would preserve my name from scandal, but

I soon found when the tongue of the latter had made free with my name, that integrity and innocence were supposed to be assumed, which aggravated my error, whilst my calm demeanour argued a growing depravity. My servant now left me—I was alone, and at the mercy of a man, of whom, until within the last few weeks, I had harboured suspicions injurious to his character. I could not leave Paris, for I looked forward hourly to be reunited to my husband. I could not ask the protection of my relatives in Seville; I had no proof that would enable me to claim their protection—everything, my reputation, my honour, all rested on my husband's will. To return alone to them would corroborate their suspicions of my dishonour; to have solicited Mr Wilton's protection, would have placed me in even a more dubious light before their eyes.

“Mr Wilton at this period conducted himself honourably and generously towards me; he sacrificed time and wealth to please me, or to render my situation endurable. He did not fascinate me then, for a truer influence was omnipotent; yet I esteemed him highly, and reposed the most entire confidence in him. This he saw, and he commenced to

bring his evil purposes to bear; I can see it all clearly enough now. My mind was strangely disordered—innuendos of Henry's faithlessness discoloured my thoughts; I again felt how inconsiderately I had acted in trusting so implicitly to him, and for a time my thoughts were so confused, that I was unable to frame any settled plan or idea. Mr Wilton marked all this; his visits were more frequent; the works which he threw in my way were such as sported with legal bonds and wedded happiness, and he would read the more impassioned sentiments that pervaded them with significance and pathos. I was as one in a dream; time passed, and a strange, undefined influence, of which he was the mainspring, exercised a singular control over my feelings.

“ Suddenly I was aroused from this moral lethargy. He must have thought his work secure, for he began to sow seeds of discontent in my mind in reference to my husband's protracted silence; then he undermined my faith in Henry's sincerity. Oh, why should I pause? He taught me to believe he was my only friend on earth; that he, whom I so truly loved, had deserted me, that he had not fled from England to France,

but from the former country to Italy. And then, as I sat bewildered, and before I could ask the nature of his designs in the falsehoods he had palmed upon me, he cast himself before me, and professed the most impassioned, unalterable devotion. I saw his perfidy,—the hollowness of his regard,—his insidious conduct was revealed. I know not what I said to him in my outraged delicacy and despair. He left me sullenly ; and as my actual position came before my mind, few ever felt so desolate as I did at that hour. Henry's treachery caused me pangs too dreadful to dwell upon. The dark waters of despair closed over my head—I was mad—for weeks death hovered around my couch.

“I was, however, reserved for even heavier trials, without friends, without succour, and alone ; at the mercy of one who had sacrificed so much to bind me to him. Small hope had I of redress, of escape, or of the power to exculpate my conduct. I perceived he had some latent reason, some cause, more potent than his base passion, for seeking to control my actions, for he left no stone unturned, when I recovered, to bend me to his views. I soon found that virtue was but a feeble shield against

this ruthless, lawless man ; therefore, from amongst my husband's effects I secured this,"—and she drew from beneath her pillow, a small stiletto of exquisite workmanship,—“and this weapon was a truer defence than tears or prayers. He was daunted ; I was his equal now ; he desisted from his disgraceful persecution. For weeks he came not near me ; I believe he had left Paris. Now, that excitement was at an end, my strength sank once more. Delirium returned. How long I was so afflicted I know not ; on the revival of consciousness I was in a wretched state. Then he came again ; he sought to vindicate himself, pleading passion as an excuse for violence. I repulsed him as before. He hinted at my obligations to him. I retorted by bidding him restore me to my husband, as I believed, through his base conduct, the separation had been effected between us. He sneered at my claim to the title of wife ; and hinted darkly that he left me for a time a prisoner.

“For some days after this I was too feeble for an effort. One evening, whilst listlessly reclining on a couch, the woman who had charge of me came into my room several times, and seemed to busy herself

about matters of little consequence, when drawing closer to me, she at last revealed her purpose, by feeling about my person, as if anxious to obtain possession of something I possessed. My suspicions were excited, particularly as I saw she bent a malignant scowl upon me, and using my utmost energy, I thrust her from me, and she left me in a confused and hasty manner. The glance this woman had bent upon me, roused me from the stupor into which I had sunk ; my faculties returned ; danger was near ; it sharpened my penetration ; and then, as a flash of light, the impression came that my husband might have been betrayed as well as I ; and the thought gave life and energy to my tottering frame.

“ I arose from my seat, and moving with difficulty to the window, opened the casement. My heated temples were cooled by the fresh air which fanned them. I then gazed around to become acquainted with the locality. Hearing voices beneath the windows, I leant partially out, and soon found the conversation referred to me. Mr Wilton’s man, whose voice I distinguished, was speaking. ‘ Not coming again ? ’ said he, in continuation, I presume,

of some previous remarks. 'Well, as he pleases. You must excuse me, then, from remaining all day on the watch here. I have a fancy to go over to the old country. 'Twould make him stare if I was to appear at his wedding.' 'He married!' answered the woman, with a laugh. 'The mother that gives her daughter to him will soon have to shed tears on her coffin. Who is to be the happy lady?' 'One you don't know,' was the reply; 'but you have seen the brother—he *was* an old friend of yours. You remember Mr Neville.'—Well may you start, Ellen," pursued Inez, gazing on her companion with an eye of tender pity and apprehension: "I must tell you all and speedily, for I am very faint." Ellen Neville signed to her to proceed.

"'It is strange,' remarked the woman after a pause, 'that Mr Neville should allow such a marriage. Besides, he knows about this job, and how well we are paid to stay here till this poor wretch pines to death; why won't he let her loose? it would save a deal of trouble.'

"'That is a secret,' answered the man; 'and as to William Neville resisting Wilton, he dares not.

Wilton has got him beneath his thumb, and no mistake, and I have got Wilton beneath my foot.' "

"I tell you, Ellen Neville," cried Inez, eagerly, noticing the former look as if she suspected the invalid was still suffering from shattered intellect, "I am not mad now; I heard all this as surely as that you are bending an eye of astonishment and doubt upon me. From that hour my determination to escape became my sole thoughts; I resolved to elude the vigilance of my keepers, to visit England, to have my fears concerning my husband cleared up, and to endeavour to save *you* from the schemes of a villain of the deepest dye. After some nights' patient watching, I effected my purpose. I came over to this country; after much difficulty and toil, I reached this neighbourhood—I met you."

"Why did you conceal yourself so long from true friends, dear Inez? Why did you not proceed at once to Vallis House, and place yourself under the protection of those who have the ability to serve you, and to afford you all the information you seek?"

"Ellen Neville, you, with so true a woman's

heart, can well divine why!" answered Inez Napier, with tears bursting into her eyes. "Am I not to the eye an outcast from society? With no proof of wedded contract—no witness to support my asseverations—unfriended and alone, how could I approach the proud relatives of Henry Napier, and say, 'In me you behold the chosen partner and once honoured wife of the head of your house.' Oh! would they not have bent a look of scorn upon my poor apparel and questionable state, and have branded me as an impostor. Henry only could redress my injuries, and establish my position in the eyes of his relatives. Besides, Ellen," she said, pensively, "at times I dare not question myself about Henry. I hardly know how it is I have confided so much to you; it seems now as if a single word would dissipate the illusion which supports my life. I am not yet positively sure that Henry voluntarily deserted me."

"You do the Napier family injustice, Inez," said Ellen, referring to the former portion of her speech; "they are good and generous of heart—they would have given credence to your sad tale, and received you with sympathies benevolently disposed towards you."

"You judge others through the medium of your own warm, unselfish feelings," answered Inez Napier; "but I feel I could not expect to meet with the belief you have so readily accorded me. And why have I sought you, Ellen?—Shall I tell you, there has long been a bond of interest between us—Some of these letters speak of you:" and Inez laid her hand upon a parcel by her side.—"There is one member in my husband's family, who has not forborne to betray the nature of his emotions, though, perhaps, he is quite unconscious that his secret has escaped from him."

A quick flush suffused Ellen Neville's brow; it was momentary only, and then the face assumed its sad and alarmed expression, as Inez continued, now very gravely,

"Something tells me that I am not long for this world; a fever is at my heart; a blight has fallen upon my frame. I have learned from old letters, bequeathed to me by my mother, to reverence the character of Mr Wilmott; he knew Henry, too, when he was young and innocent. His presence will soothe my dying hour, and we can blend our prayers for Henry's pardon, from One who may judge him more sternly than I.

Grant me this request. Mr Wilmott will, I know, comply with your slightest wish." The speaker here paused, and after taking a small Bible that lay on the bed, she seized Ellen's hands, and said:—

"Ellen Neville, you have heard the history of a sorrowing, persecuted woman; pledge me, on this book, to do justice to my memory when I am no more. You may one day meet *him*; tell *him* I died blessing him; and, Ellen"—here Inez wound her arms about her companion, and cried, in an intensely affecting voice, "You *will* assure him, I loved him unto death; and should he drop a tear to my memory, ease his sorrow, as you have mine; and for your charity, may God bless and protect you."

Her strength was gone, she sank almost senseless in Ellen's arms. When she had rallied, she pressed the hand she held to her lips, and murmured, "Remember."

CHAPTER XIV.

BEFORE noon of the day following Ellen Neville's interview with poor Inez, Mr Wilmott was on his road to Wyke. The sad history had been communicated to him, and he was now seeking the lonely dwelling of affliction, to comfort and console. Mr Wilmott reached the quiet little village of Wyke, and at once proceeded to the cottage of Mrs Mitchell. He gazed on the lowly tenement as he approached it, with an eye of melancholy interest: and, as he marked the honeysuckle trailing over one particular casement, he wondered if that could be *her* room. With quiet noiseless step he passed up the small garden walk, and raised the door-latch cautiously; his countenance was even paler than

its wont. Nature's purest thrill was at his heart. Mrs Mitchell had marked his arrival ; a few minutes only elapsed, and he was admitted to the chamber of the sufferer. He drew near the couch on which Inez lay,—she was pillowed up, expectant. In the dark lustrous eye there was a feeling of anxiety beyond all measure intense ; the countenance was pale as drifted snow.

Mr Wilmott strove to speak calmly ; but one glance at that sorrow-laden countenance, and his simple, earnest tones, were followed by those of emotion and pathos.

"You believe me then, good Mr Wilmott," the invalid summoned nerve to say, for she was greatly moved by her visiter's manner.

"Believe you!" said he, taking her hand and holding it between his own: "Yes, I do believe you, fully, implicitly. "That brow"—and he gazed earnestly on the features of the invalid—"the more striking likeness as you now lie, remind me of those now gone—the Napier features are before me, the expression cannot be misunderstood."

Mr Wilmott gazed with moistened eye on the sweet earnestness of that soft face upturned to him

in tender appeal and confidence, and his lip quivered as he said :—

“ It is a hard task for our frail, weak minds, to be brought to say, ‘ Thy will be done.’ It is above nature fully to resign itself in the spring of life to the absolute dominion of this command. Still, Inez, the purest aim of an earthly being is to become worthy of a heavenly rest. To the heart of faith, Providence is near with a strengthening aid in the hour of peril ; and if you submit to its care, your mind will be imbued with fortitude, which will lighten your suffering, and yield up to the spirit a manifest advantage over the weakness of the flesh.”

“ I have much to ask, much to learn, Mr Wilmott,” said Inez, in a low voice, “ before I can shut my eyes to a world that has been harsh and cruel to the orphan.”

“ I can read your thoughts ; I know what you desire to learn. You would receive all the intelligence I can afford you—you would speak of your husband, of my poor young friend. Inez, is it not so ? Nay, you must control your emotion, or I shall not be able to gratify you. You need not

reply ; I will tell you all we know ;" and Mr Wilmott cautiously, yet fully, revealed the position of the Napier family ; their trouble about the object of mutual interest, touching on the bond given to Wilton, on the prolonged silence of her husband, which, from comparing notes, had continued from the period of the elopement from Seville ; and he then dwelt on the distress which the family had experienced in consequence of this silence, and concluded by alluding, with much delicacy, to the fears, which now deeply impressed them, for the safety, the health, possibly the life, of him so dear to them all.

Inez drank in every word ; at the conclusion of Mr Wilmott's remarks, a shiver shook her frame, as she cried, hoarsely : " And you think he may be dead !" and her eyes closed for a time, as if to exclude from her sight the picture of her husband in the stillness of the grave as her imagination placed him ; then, as if casting off this weakness of the clay, the pride of the young wife's heart burst forth with :

" O God, if this be so, I thank thee ! Better, yes, better it were, to mourn him as one sleeping in the

tomb, than that I should descend to it believing that the life of love which I lavished upon him should have been given to one undeserving. Oh, Henry," she cried, lifting up her hands in an attitude of prayer—"in death as in life we shall be united. I can prepare to join you now, my husband. I will strive to render my wayward spirit an acceptable offering, that I may go from this cold world into the sunshine of heaven and thy home You know not the good you have done me," she said, turning an eye of beaming gratitude on her companion; "I can bear life now with calm submission—hoping—trusting. Now, Mr Wilmott, I can say, 'Thy will be done.'"

Mr Wilmott could not attempt at this moment to rob her of the hope to which, indeed, dire must be the heart's necessity to cling. It was a hope not founded on thoughts of earthly reunion—no hope of life and its pleasures, but hope for the life of trust and love, which before she believed to be bereft of all beauty and honour, through the treachery of the one beloved. Yet he must bring her back to life, to present duties, for he feared the sand was running low.

“Inez,” he said, with grave solemnity, “afflictions to those who have led a virtuous life are salutary wounds; sorrow refines the soul of the righteous, and though it is natural we should cling to life, yet, when we are smitten as you are now, the once bright aspect of earthly things assumes, through God’s providence, so changed a form, that even death itself is robbed of its terrors. Then it is, Inez, that we become aware there is still a *love* which calls for and demands our purest sympathy—a love which is not dependent on things temporal, or governed or controlled by worldly influences. This is the love, which, if we seek, God yields to us. But we must not so build on a mere selfish love, Inez;” and here Mr Wilmott took her hand, and his manner was that of gentle entreaty. “Love, as you treasure it, for an earthly being, is not a reward of virtuous acts, for though it reaches the climax of its desire, it may reap sorrow and bitterness, or the fragrance inhaled may be a subtle poison to the welfare of the soul. Earthly love is a sweet and felicitous appendage to our natural sympathies, added to them to increase our enjoyments, to fulfil God’s purposes, and to cast a brightness around our daily course, but not to supplant

that divine essence, which alone promotes faith, humility, and resignation. You have built very largely on expectancy of worldly happiness, but such feelings are not in harmony with the sick-couch, though they will obtrude in our youth of health and prosperity."

Poor Inez, her head was bowed low, and her ear received the words of admonition which fell from the lips of her reverend companion; but her feelings were too agitated now for self-scrutiny—such a task must be performed when the mind is less subject to external influences.

* * * *

Mr Wilmott had extended his hand, and he was speaking soothingly, when a step sounded in the passage, and a light knock was heard on the door. Then Dr Powell entered, his countenance most expressive of pure satisfaction and interest. He had spent several hours of the past night in the cottage, and had been a source of great comfort to the invalid—few physicians were more capable of administering to the mind diseased than he. Dr Powell's hand rested a few moments on his patient's pulse, and then bending a kind smile upon her, he said:—"I have brought a visiter, who would take

no refusal:" but, without waiting for a reply, he left the room and joined two ladies in the passage. "With safety," he remarked; "but Miss Neville had better precede you," and Ellen entered the sick-chamber. Inez uttered an exclamation of pleasure, as Ellen flew to her side and drew her to her bosom: but a moment, and she started—there was another female eye upon her—a lady standing within the threshold, with hands tightly pressed upon her breast, as if to still the swell of deep, and as it proved, overmastering emotion. It was Lady Napier who drew near; the yearnings of her good heart, towards the loved one of her lost son, were indeed all-powerful and pure.

"This lady, Inez, is your second mother; it is Lady Napier, dear one," said Ellen Neville, in a whisper.

Lady Napier's gaze was one of deep, unutterable tenderness. She could not speak, but drew to the bedside, with nervous, uncertain steps, her knees tottering beneath her. Inez fixed one long, longing look upon the mother of him so dear, and then, emboldened by the vast interest evinced, she held out her arms; and, as Lady Napier caught her to her heart, she sank almost fainting on the couch.

"Why, why, dear love, did you not seek me out; why was I not your first thoughts, my Inez?" asked Lady Napier.

"I found a sweet comforter," answered Inez, gazing affectionately on Ellen Neville—"all fervent feeling and sensibility."

"Not a word of the past," cried Dr Powell, turning from the window at which he had been standing: "This is my kingdom, and my rule is despotic."

Lady Napier approached him, and said: "It must be done."

"I have my fears," answered Dr Powell, gravely.

"What! with a bed in the carriage?"

"It is the excitement I fear, not the mere removal," replied Dr Powell, unwilling to assent to a plan that had been discussed for the removal of the invalid to Vallis House.

"Then I will remain here," said Lady Napier, firmly: "I will not leave this room whilst this sweet creature, the wife of my poor boy, is exposed to danger."

Dr Powell whispered a few words to Inez:

"Will you be very good and quiet, and behave exactly as I enjoin," he said in conclusion.

"Oh yes, indeed I will," she answered, with a sweet smile: "Do with me as you will; but, dare I hope, I shall not be parted from these kind friends?"

In less than an hour, Inez had been prepared for her removal. Ellen Neville was most zealous in rendering the invalid proof against exposure; never had woman more tender nurses than Inez found now. Finding all in readiness, Dr Powell raised the chair in which Inez sat, for she was too weak to walk, and bore it from the apartment. On descending to the common room, Inez, who had her face to the windows, beheld a tall figure turn quickly, and cast a searching glance upon her; then, with nervous step, he approached, and bending over her, with quivering lip, he whispered, with tremulous voice:—

"I am your brother Charles, Inez, your friend and protector."

She knew as much, and her arms were open to him. He took her from the chair, as if she had been an infant, and held her to his heart. Ellen Neville was the first to draw near.

"Charles—Mr Napier," she said, with her hand upon his arm, "control your emotion, you know not what injury you may do."

Charles Napier did not seem to listen. He saw the carriage at the door, and, with a stride, he crossed the threshold, and placed Inez on the bed that had been prepared for her.

Ellen Neville with Lady Napier had entered the carriage on the opposite side, and as Napier took Inez's hand, Ellen, by a sudden impulse, extended hers too, and Napier—he was more collected now—held them both between his own, and would have retained them still, but Ellen, with a blush, drew hers gently away, as she said, "You must be our *avant courier* to Mary."

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